"Why don't you leave? Why are you so eager to be attacked?" Taichi glared at Tomoe. His eyes emitted a red glow, and Tomoe found he was unable to tear his gaze away.

While enjoying the cool Yokohama night air, Viscount Akihiro Sanders Tomoe met a wild man, whose eyes burned like fire. Intrigued, he invited the young man back to his home.

Nearly a hundred years ago, a spurned lover ended Tomoe's life. Madame had given him new life, but this gift was not without its limitations. Living again in Japan after an extended time abroad, Tomoe was on the prowl for a new lover. But he may have gotten more than he hoped for in young Taichi Yamagami. A young man with abnormal strength and eyes like fire, he awakened sensations within Tomoe that he had never felt before. But this young man was hiding a secret of his own. Influenced by the ebb and flow of the moon, he could be a sweet, naive intellectual, or a rough, demanding lover. Tomoe has never had a lover quite like this...what kind of man is Taichi?

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Secret Moon 月の秘密

Taichi passionately kissed Tomoe's lips, to which warmth had finally returned. Tomoe, fully aroused, returned the kiss with interest.

Written By
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Birthday: June 9th
Zodiac Sign: Gemini
Blood Type: A
Born in Tokyo.
Currently lives in Chiba Prefecture.

From the window where I work, I can see the sun and the moon and the stars. I like to watch the amazing shapes of the clouds floating across the blue sky. I can see the trees as they're whipped back and forth by the wind. But for a year, I've watched from the same fixed point. Where's my flower-viewing party?

Secret Moon 月の秘密

Written by
SIIRA GOU

Illustrations by
SATO TOMOE

English translation by
P.T. Rillo

June
Los Angeles

Secret Moon

Near Harbor View Spot, a popular Yokohama sightseeing area, there was an abandoned western-style house. Ivy covered the walls, and a broken weathervane teetered on the roof. People called it a haunted house, but one day it was torn down and a stylish new residence took its place.

Because it was a bit far from the park, tourists weren't always rudely peering through the windows. The neighbors, too, all lived in large houses with huge gardens, and no matter how stylish and beautiful the house appeared on the outside, they showed no interest in it.

The house and garage were completed in a few days; the surrounding wall and gate had just been beautifully repaired when an old man in a black suit visited the neighbors.

The man appeared to be a foreigner, but he greeted the neighbors in perfect Japanese: "I am the butler for Akihiro Sanders Tomoe-sama. We apologize deeply for any inconvenience you may have suffered during the construction. Because my master has lived so long overseas, he is unfamiliar with Japanese customs, but please bear with him."

With a smile, he offered the neighbors tins of expensive English tea, purchased from the same store that sold tea to the British royal family.

One of the neighbors, an old woman, said, "Ah, I remember. My mother used to speak of Viscount Tomoe long ago. This would be his grandson...no, his great-grandson?"

"I'm deeply sorry, but I know only about the present Viscount Tomoe, Akihiro-sama." With that, the butler bowed elegantly and concluded the visit.

For a short while, this descendant of Viscount Tomoe was discussed all throughout the neighborhood—what kind of person he was, and how he made a living—but before the tea tins were even empty, interest in the subject had died out.

The viscount's descendant rarely left the house. Occasionally at night, the garage door would rise with a clatter, and a jet-black Jaguar would leave, but no one knew where it went.

None of the neighbors had ever even seen what Akihiro Sanders Tomoe looked like. If they had, there would have been much more discussion.

With looks that beautiful, the women would surely have begun entertaining the wrong kinds of ideas. And the men, at the scent of a young, successful male, would surely have wanted to make his acquaintance, sensing that there might be some business advantage for them.

But no one in the neighborhood had met Tomoe face to face. The ones who might have known the most about him were the shop clerks who delivered food and other goods to his home.

Despite that plenty of delivery clerks visited, they only ever saw the butler.

Akihiro Tomoe thought that tailored suits from London's Savile Row were, after all, the best in the world. Each shop had its own features, but Tomoe particularly liked suits by an up-and-coming black designer.

"The line is very elegant."

Dressed in a very dark-gray suit, Tomoe admired his reflection in the large mirror near the front door.

"Anthony, do you think there are any shops in Japan where suits such as this one can be made?" Tomoe smiled affectionately at his butler, who was reflected in a corner of the mirror.

"I suppose that there may be. Japanese men wear suits now on a daily basis."

Holding out a black coat, the butler continued in his typically calm manner: "In any case, Tomoe-sama, I was very surprised that you would do this kind of work in Japan. There are so many other things you could have done."

"This is play, Anthony. I have enough money now. Surely I can enjoy myself here for twenty years."

"Japan moves very quickly now. Twenty years...might be difficult."

"I suppose you're right. When did Japan become such a fast-paced country, I wonder?"

Tomoe wore a thoughtful expression as he put on his shoes and took his coat from the butler. "The wonderful customs and elegance have disappeared. It's just like this new house. It's solid and functional, but there are also many things that just seem pointless to me. To give it personality costs money, but the longest it will be around is fifty years."

Tomoe grasped the door handle and jiggled it. At first glance it was a splendid door, but to Tomoe, who was familiar with the massive antique doors in England, it just seemed showy.

"Well, I'm off."

"Please be careful."

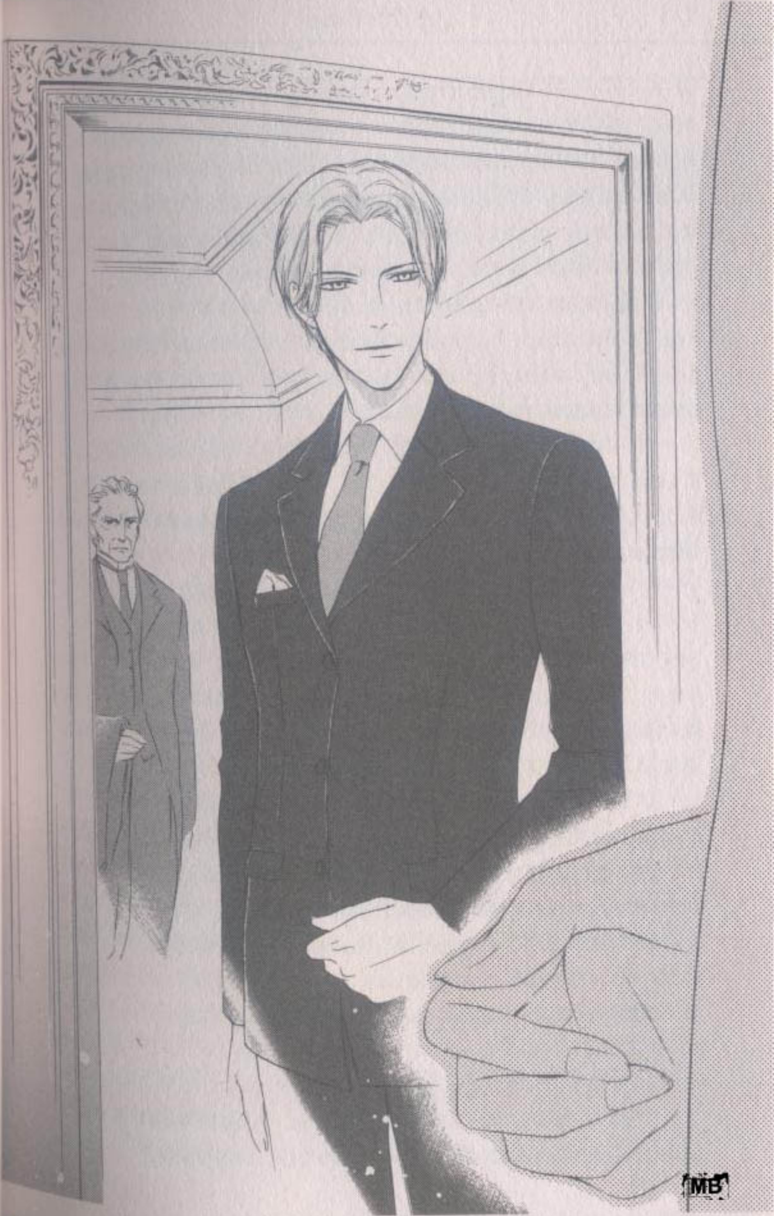
The butler accompanied him as far as the garage, where he pressed the switch to open the garage door. Tomoe got into the jet-black Jaguar, and, even though it was a chilly November evening, drove off with the windows down.

The cold night wind ruffled his bright hair, which seemed to have been dyed. His fair skin and facial features, including the high bridge of his nose, led one to imagine that English blood coursed through his veins. His irises were nearly gray, and his lips were red. His large, deep-set eyes threw his facial features into sharp relief.

But for all of that, he didn't give the impression that he was delicate. The young people of high-class families were expected to value the arts of the pen and the sword; as proof of that, Tomoe's shoulders were broad and his chest was very muscular.

"Beautiful," Tomoe murmured, dazzled by the view spread out in front of his windshield.

Tomoe was very taken with the nightscape of the city. Up until now, he had lived only in quiet places—even in London, he'd lived in the suburbs. Because of this, living in a city where the lights never went out was new to him.



Even though it was after eight o'clock, the traffic was still heavy, so Tomoe left the main streets and headed for the center of town. Near the station, along a street lined with tall buildings, there was a garage Tomoe had already rented. He pulled the Jaguar in and checked the cars that were already parked there.

There was a Mercedes Benz, a BMW, an Audi, and a Porsche. It looked like an exhibition of foreign cars. They were all cars belonging to employees at the establishment run by Tomoe.

Tomoe put on his coat and began walking. Those who passed him turned to watch him walk by. Their faces alive with curiosity, they covertly watched Tomoe's back.

He didn't look like a businessman returning home. He also didn't seem like a host or club manager, just beginning a day's work. He didn't look like someone who did academic work, but he also didn't seem like someone involved in the service industry. No one could begin to guess what he did for a living.

Tomoe walked through a large building entrance and descended the stairs to the basement. He stopped in front of a cheap door—or at least it seemed so to Tomoe. The customers probably saw it differently. Tomoe opened the extravagant leather-covered door with the name "Crimson" written on it and entered a brightly lit room containing about twenty young men. They all bowed at once.

"Good evening, sir."

The first to approach was Minamikawa, the establishment's manager. Although he said he was twenty-six, he was actually thirty. He was entrusted with the management of Tomoe's establishment, which was a boys' pub. The previous owner had planned to shut the pub down completely, but Tomoe had bought it and retained the entire staff.

That previous owner was a woman who had taken advantage of her own staff, and whose misappropriation of the pub's profits was so brazen that even customers spoke poorly of it. However, since Tomoe had taken over things were much more stable. The best thing of all was that Tomoe did not constantly interfere in the management of the pub.

"Would you like something to eat?"

Minamikawa guided Tomoe to a table. Rather than sit, Tomoe glanced around the pub, narrowing his eyes against the bright lights.

"No, thank you. How are things going? Are you having problems with anything?"

"Not at the moment. Ever since we reopened, things have been going very well. Profits have greatly increased, and the staff is very happy."

Minamikawa was not just attempting to curry favor. Tomoe had increased the amount of money the men received for being selected hosts and provided more money to widen the variety of alcohol available as "bottle reserves."

Tomoe believed that those willing to work should be paid for their efforts. He provided the capital for the business; if it showed a modest profit after a while, that was good enough.

"Sir, might I ask how old you really are?"

Tomoe smiled in reply, although the expression on his face seemed to say, *Are you interested?*

"I believe I said I was twenty-eight—that wasn't a lie."

"I see. I do apologize; you look so much younger than your age. But when I talk with you, you seem so steady. Just once, it would be very nice if you would come around while the pub was open. I'm sure you'd have many fans."

"I'm not good with women. Just looking at them makes me want to attack."

Tomoe said this with a straight face, but Minamikawa laughed, thinking that he was joking. "I'm sure that there are many women who would love to be attacked by you, sir. All our customers are young women."

Unlike the usual host club, Tomoe's pub was rather inexpensive, and the hosts were not required to go out on paid dates with the customers. It was basically a place where women could go to have noisy fun with hosts who treated them like friends.

Tomoe hadn't particularly planned to run this kind of establishment; one night, by accident, he overheard Minamikawa and some other hosts complaining. Minamikawa had wanted to buy the pub himself to keep it going, but didn't have enough money. Like a bolt out of the blue, Tomoe appeared and offered to buy the pub.

They must have been quite surprised. Who would imagine that a young man like him—a wealthy man with dual citizenship in England and Japan—would offer to invest in a boys' pub?

Not only that, he was good-looking enough that he could make even more money working as a host himself. He had the elegant demeanor of a wealthy man, to say nothing of his gorgeous face. He also had the subtle refinement worthy of a descendant of a viscount.

The boys all gossiped that if he had such an interest in this kind of pub, he must really like women. But Tomoe never stayed until nine o'clock in the evening, when the pub opened. He either showed up early to check on preparations or came by around five in the morning, after the pub had closed.

If Minamikawa had been a dishonest man, he could have no doubt taken Tomoe to the cleaners, with Tomoe himself none the wiser. But because Minamikawa wanted to have his own pub someday, and because he was very reliable and hard-working, he kept accurate accounts.

"So it's an era when women use money to buy boys to play with...The world is a strange place."

Because Tomoe had lived so long in England, Minamikawa guessed that he didn't know much about Japan.

"What about England? Do they have places like this there?"

"There are lots of bars where single people go to meet each other, but I don't believe they have bars like these. A lot has changed in Japan—maybe the women most of all. It seems to me that Japanese women live more freely than those of other countries."

As Tomoe mused aloud with a far-off look in his eyes, everyone felt a sudden urge to nod their heads in agreement. Minamikawa was no exception; involuntarily, he nodded with the others.

"It seems that businesses in which women exploit men are the most vigorous now. What do you think, Minamikawa-kun?"

Even though he was younger than Minamikawa, Tomoe addressed him as "kun" as though it were natural. But Tomoe's commanding presence was such that, remarkably, Minamikawa let it pass.

"I think you're right. Whether it's fashion or gourmet dining, it's the women who are controlling the purse strings. On the other hand, only men would take out huge loans to buy Porsches they can barely drive."

Minamikawa, who drove a Porsche himself, laughed at his own foolishness as he said this. He understood that in an inexpensive pub, no matter how many times a host was selected by customers, the really wealthy women always headed for more expensive clubs, thinking such places must have more to offer.

"Minamikawa-kun. If things go well with this pub, why don't we try a higher-class place next time? If you hear of a good place that's up for sale, why don't you look into it?"

"Yes, sir."

It was as though Tomoe was reading Minamikawa's deepest desires, and as he spoke, a smile crossed his lips—a smile that didn't reach his eyes. It sent shivers through everyone in the room.

"I'll be going now."

"Are you leaving already?"

"It's the time difference. I have an overseas

business deal to take care of on my computer."

Minamikawa nodded his understanding, but there was still one thing he didn't understand. Why was Tomoe investing in a boys' pub that would never make much money, rather than making normal business deals? Strange ideas ran through his head—what if this was some kind of research for Tomoe's next big project?

"When you are trying to get money out of women, you have to be clever, so that they are happy to give it to you. You have to charm them. They are our valued customers, after all," Tomoe said to the staff before turning and walking away noiselessly.

Minamikawa accompanied him as far as the entrance and then said goodbye.

It was later than early evening, but not yet midnight—too early to go to bed. Tomoe began walking down the street alone.

Although he'd told Minamikawa that he had work to do, there wasn't really anything he needed to do that could be called work. The several businesses he had invested in were all doing well, as were the small hotels Tomoe owned here and there in Europe.

It was an era in which, if you had money, life wasn't too difficult. As Tomoe watched a young woman walking alone ahead of him, he thought that more than anything else, he was grateful for peace.

Women in this country are very energetic.

"Watch out," Tomoe warned himself, and looking away, he began walking again.

Walking behind a woman is gentlemanly, isn't it? Especially since Tomoe had no desire to have sex with this woman. So why did he want to follow her?

Everyone has secrets that they don't want others to know. Even Tomoe, who seemed so perfect, had a secret or two of his own. He didn't like having women work for him, which is why a place like the boys' pub, where all the staff were men, was ideal.

Equal opportunity employment laws had been passed before he even knew it. If he were running a large company, he would of course have to hire women, or the feminist groups would come after him.

In this country, a manager was no longer free to say that he just didn't like women. Work opportunities were equal for men and women, and opportunities to play were also equal for men and women.

Midwinter had arrived, and the cold night wind felt good to Tomoe. He hated the heat of summer. In summer, women exposed their flesh more. Just thinking about it depressed him.

Tomoe meandered along, and when he finally became aware of his surroundings, found himself in a squalid part of town. Gaudy signboards were everywhere, and the odor of food made with cheap ingredients flooded the street.

A woman outside one of the shops was indirectly watching the men walking down the street. When she saw Tomoe, she instantly donned a cajoling smile, but because he seemed so withdrawn, she did not call out to him.

"So there are still places with dangerous shops like these," Tomoe murmured to himself.

He suddenly came upon a man who was surrounded by four or five other men. This was the kind

of trouble often seen in places like these. Tomoe intended to walk on by, but, thinking that the man's brown eyes were somehow glowing red from underneath his shaggy bangs, Tomoe decided to stop and observe.

"I was just asking directions," the man protested in a low, clear voice.

"You had a meal, didn't you?! You touched one of the women, didn't you?! You've got to pay up!"

"I'm not paying that much money for one plate of terrible fried noodles! You guys are nuts!"

"You seem pretty strong, but acting tough is just going to get you in more trouble."

With these words, one of the gang members suddenly grabbed the man's shirt. The man brushed the offending hand away. As he did so, another man tried to hit him, but the man responded with a mighty punch that sent his attacker to the ground.

Tomoe leaned against a dirty signboard and smiled with delight as he watched the fray.

The fighting man was wearing just a tank top under a black leather jacket. As he fought furiously, the jacket moved, revealing glimpses of his muscled chest, a sight that pleased Tomoe's aesthetic sense.

Absorbed, Tomoe murmured, "What a beautiful man."

Tomoe's tastes, it seemed, differed greatly from the norms of society.

Long, unkempt hair, dirty jeans, black leather jacket—and, while this man's face, with its rough vitality, was handsome, not many people would call him beautiful. Most people would prefer the staff of Tomoe's boys' pub; with their neat appearances and senses of style, they would be considered the ideal of a beautiful man.

The man demolished his attackers one by one without even working up a sweat. But the kind of men who frequent places like this don't go down easily, and when a knife suddenly appeared in the hand of one of the attackers, Tomoe called out without thinking.

"Watch out! The man behind you has a knife!"

Although the man reacted immediately to Tomoe's warning, he was unable to avoid a cut on the back of his hand. He was able to knock the knife away and avoid another wound, but when Tomoe saw another attacker bring out a knife, he finally stepped forward.

"Five on one doesn't really seem fair."

The men must have seen Tomoe approaching, but because of his showy clothing, they probably assumed that he could be ignored.

"Stay out of this! Back off!"

The knife-wielding man apparently assumed that he could ignore Tomoe after these words, but instead he suddenly found himself grasped by the collar and tossed aside.

"I'm pretty sure that such unfair odds are against the rules. Or are such partial rules only for Tokyo?"

His expression still calm, Tomoe grabbed yet another attacker and kicked his legs out from under him. Perhaps the clothes he was wearing had truly thrown the gang off-guard; at first glance, Tomoe seemed somewhat delicate, but there was real power in the judo moves he used.

While this was going on, the other man finished off the remaining attackers. One of the bad things about the slums is that even when something's finished, it's not finished.

"You'd better get out of here. Unless you want to get arrested," Tomoe spoke to the young man in a very intimate tone.

"No...the cops are..."

"If that's the case, then you'd better flee now."

Taking the man by the arm, Tomoe began walking away quickly. He felt very excited. The man was exactly Tomoe's type. And that wasn't all. This stranger wasn't just strong—there was absolutely no scent of fear or agitation emanating from his body. Tomoe liked strong men who remained calm even in situations as dangerous as the one they had just encountered. The arm Tomoe was holding was muscular and sturdy; he didn't let go.

"My car's not far away—I'll give you a ride. It's too dangerous for you to wander around in this area."

"I just asked them where my friend's place was. They said they knew him and dragged me into that bar."

"I suppose a kind woman appeared and urged you to eat and drink?"

The man hung his head and answered in a subdued tone: "Yes."

"It's a clip joint. They prey on inexperienced young men like you, or on drunks. They trap you, and then charge exorbitant sums of money. It's a boring criminal technique."

"Thanks for helping me out."

The man tried to pull his arm away, but Tomoe reached quickly for his wounded hand.

"You're bleeding. You should get this taken care of immediately."

"Ah, it's nothing. It'll heal right up if I just lick it." The stranger spoke as though the wound were nothing, but in fact, blood was flowing freely from the straight cut.

"I wonder if licking actually would heal it...It seems a bit more serious than that."

And with that, Tomoe pressed his tongue to the wound. It's hard to say who was more surprised—the man or Tomoe himself. It wasn't a rational act; to do something like this to a man he didn't even know.

They stared at each other, both men feeling awkward. But Tomoe didn't just feel off balance—he also felt a stirring of deep interest in this man.

"My name is Akihiro Tomoe. I own a shop near here."

In order to gain the man's trust, Tomoe handed him one of the business cards he'd had made when he returned to Japan.

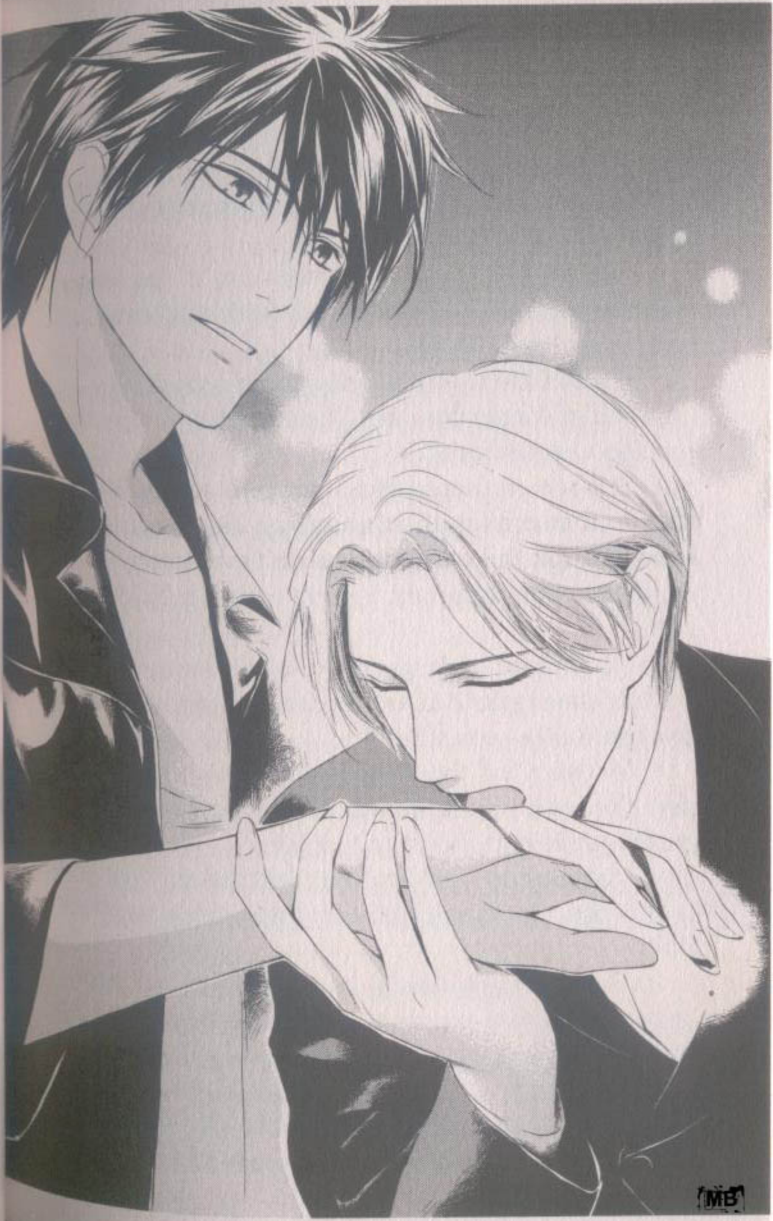
The man absently replied, "My name is Taichi Yamagami."

"Yamagami-kun—how old are you?"

"Four..."

He couldn't be four, and fourteen was out of the question, too. He didn't look as though he could be thirty-four. *He must be twenty-four.* Tomoe smiled, delighted.

The young man squirmed. "I have to leave now. I



have to find my friend's house."

"I'll help—do you have his address?"

"It's okay. I have a map."

"Why don't you let me see it? I'm pretty familiar with this area."

Taichi took a piece of paper out of his leather jacket's inner pocket. It had been folded many times and was beginning to fall apart.

"Kakei Dojo—what kind of dojo is this?"

"It's a karate dojo, but I heard that they were also running a bar in front."

They were approaching the end of the squalid alley. Just beyond it was the parking lot. Tomoe didn't know if Kakei Dojo could be reached by automobile, but no matter what happened, he wanted to get Taichi into his car.

"Couldn't you go tomorrow? Does whatever you're planning have to be done tonight? You should get that hand taken care of first."

As they left the alley, Taichi came to a sudden stop. For some reason, he was looking down, and bit by bit, his whole body began to tremble.

"Yamagami-kun? Are you feeling okay?"

"You don't have to worry about me anymore. Go."

Up until now, Taichi had spoken in a faltering voice, which had made a very good impression on Tomoe, but suddenly the young man's whole demeanor changed.

"Are you sure you're not in shock from your wound? You really should get it disinfected as soon as possible."

"It's none of your business. Get out of here fast. If you're with me, you'll just get caught up in trouble again."

Taichi did not lift his face as he spoke. He looked steadily at the ground, then spun on his heels and walked away.

"Hmmm." Tomoe stroked a long finger across his chin and watched the sturdy figure as it receded. "I wonder if he could read my intentions?"

He wasn't just admiring Taichi's upper body, either—his tight-fitting jeans showed off a pair of long legs. And unlike most Japanese men, he had a high, firm ass, which Tomoe thought was beautiful.

"Although he's so wild, his scent is very pure."

Tomoe traced his own lips. The taste of Taichi's blood lingered in his mouth.

"I didn't want to use dirty tricks, but it looks like I have no choice."

Determined, Tomoe followed silently in Taichi's wake.

"Yamagami-kun."

At the sound of Tomoe's voice, Taichi turned to face him. Tomoe placed a hand on his shoulder. The viscount was five feet nine inches tall, but Taichi still topped him by five inches.

"You don't have to be so cautious."

Tomoe tilted Taichi's chin up and caught a glimpse of the man's eyes underneath his bangs. Perhaps it was the effect of the neon lights, but Taichi's eyes seemed to glow an eerie red.

When Taichi realized that Tomoe was looking at his face, he turned away. "Leave me alone."

"Calm down. I'm not planning to do anything to you. I just want to sit down and talk." As he said this, Tomoe casually touched the base of Taichi's neck. Then, bringing his face close to Taichi's ear, he whispered in a low voice, "You can look for your friend tomorrow."

"Yes, that's right. There's no real hurry."

For some reason, Taichi seemed to be fixed in place, listening intently to Tomoe's voice.

"Tomorrow. Now you need to come to my house and get your hand taken care of."

"Get my hand taken care of..."

"Get your hand taken care of. That's our top priority."

The wildness that Taichi had briefly shown before completely disappeared, and he stood meekly, listening for Tomoe's next words.

Tomoe again whispered gently into Taichi's ear: "There's nothing at all to be worried about. I'm your friend." He casually draped his arm around Taichi's shoulders and guided him back the way they had come.

"The weather forecasts are always wrong!" Taichi blurted out angrily as they emerged onto a wider street.

"Weather forecasts?"

"They said it was going to be cloudy."

Involuntarily, Tomoe looked up at the sky. There were some clouds, but the stars could be seen twinkling brightly in the gaps between them, and a half-moon was slowly climbing into the heavens.

"You certainly do say some odd things."

"You do too. Why do I feel like I can't resist you?"

"It's destiny."

Tomoe smiled, but unfortunately Taichi was looking down again, and missed Tomoe's beautiful expression.

Anthony, the butler, rarely let his emotions show. But when Tomoe returned home, he did not attempt to conceal his unhappiness.

"Welcome home, sir. As you requested in your phone call, I have prepared a meal."

As he turned to face the politely bowing butler, Tomoe wore the expression of a child being scolded. "First, please take care of his wound, and then prepare a bath and a change of clothes for him."

"I'm terribly sorry, but there is nothing in this house suitable for someone like your guest to wear."

"A bathrobe will be fine."

Taichi wandered freely around the room, but it was impossible to tell if he was listening to the two men talk.

The living room was covered with a chic carpet, and a fashionable sofa set by a popular European designer was arranged on top of it. The lights had been dimmed, and the room was enveloped in shadows. In one spot, a bright light illuminated a painting on the wall.

It looked like it could be a painting done by a world-famous artist, but Taichi lacked the knowledge to know whether it was real or not.

On the other side of the living room, through an immense glass door that stretched from floor to ceiling, there was a broad terrace with a night view of the harbor. As though all thoughts of sleep had been forgotten, the lights of the town on the opposite shore twinkled brightly.

The wind had kicked up, and the clouds were clearing away, allowing the moon to shine. It was a beautiful night, but Taichi seemed nervous. He refused to go near the windows and stood trembling, his hands thrust into the pockets of his jeans.

"This way, sir."

"His name is Yamagami—Taichi Yamagami."

"Yes, sir...This way, Yamagami-sama. After I tend to your wound, please feel free to use the bath. I'm embarrassed that we can only offer you a bathrobe to wear while you eat."

"I don't need a bath."

Taichi seemed irritated as he said this, and the butler raised his eyebrows.

"As it seems you are to stay the night, please don't hesitate to make use of the facilities." The butler made a motion as though to show Taichi out of the room.

As he did so, Taichi tipped his head and stared at Tomoe. "What am I doing here? I don't belong in a place like this. Something's odd."

"In the car, you said you were hungry. While we're eating, you can tell me about this friend you're looking for, and tomorrow I'll take you to find him." Tomoe smiled at him.

Accepting this, Taichi followed the butler, glancing at his surroundings.

"I wonder if he likes wine? No, I think Scotch, beer, or champagne would be more suitable. Or perhaps he would like Japanese sake better."

Tomoe cheerfully examined the labels of the bottles on the home bar set up between the living room and dining room. From a small refrigerator filled with bottles with labels rarely seen in Japan, Tomoe took an aluminum pack of juice, poured it into a wineglass, and drank. He raised his glass in a small toast. For some reason, Tomoe's pale face colored slightly. As though he was feeling slightly drunk, Tomoe began singing an old English song under his breath.

"Tomoe-sama." The butler returned after showing Taichi to the bathroom and launched a verbal attack. "Are you doing this terrible thing again?"

"Don't worry so much. He's a beautiful young man, isn't he? He's overflowing with vitality, and unlike most Japanese people today, he doesn't smell unclean."

"You must control these whims of yours. If you want a pet, you should keep a bird or something."

"Don't worry so much, Anthony. I'm just going to spend the evening talking with him and feasting my eyes on his body, and then I'll put him back."

"Really? Whatever you do, please don't take him to your bed." Anthony's eyes, more gray than blue, clouded with suspicion when Tomoe avoided his gaze.

"Even I just want to enjoy myself sometimes."

Although he said this under his breath, the butler, whose sharp hearing belied his age, understood him clearly.

"Tomoe-sama, if you go too far, you will regret it later. I don't like it when you are upset. You are more kind-hearted than you will admit even to yourself."

"Thank you, Anthony. For your sake as well as mine, I promise that I won't go too far with him."

"Thank you, Tomoe-sama. Which wine should I prepare for dinner?"

"What are we having?"

"I didn't have much warning, so the only thing I had on hand was veal steak."

As the topic shifted to work subjects, the butler returned to his formal manner.

Like a true leader, Tomoe answered with generous warmth: "Then we'll have blood-red wine with dinner, and afterward, a fiery vodka. I think this will be a fun evening."

As though already drunk, Tomoe danced toward the dining room. Unlike the living room, the dining room contained only antique European-style furniture.

The butler lit some candles. After selecting a wine, he presented the label to Tomoe. "How about this one, sir?"

"I see. You really don't consider him a worthy guest." Tomoe glanced up at the butler as he said this. The brand of wine the butler had selected was so inexpensive, it showed that he did not value Taichi as a guest.

"Excuse me, Tomoe-sama, but a young man such as he couldn't possibly understand the value of wine."

"If that's the case, then how about a young Chilean wine?"

"For sangria?"

"Sure, I don't mind sangria."

With a hint of laughter in his eyes, the butler left the dining room. As he did so, he passed Taichi coming in. The bathrobe stretched tight across Taichi's chest.

"I feel like I'm in a bad dream. What's wrong with me? I never should have come to this city." Without waiting for an invitation, Taichi sat in a chair across from Tomoe and smiled dejectedly. "I may be strange, but you're even stranger. What kind of person brings a foreign butler to Japan?"

"Anthony served me well when I lived in England. They may be thought to be extinct, but he's a genuine butler. To understand the true magnificence of a butler, all you have to do is watch him close an umbrella. The umbrellas he closes are neater than those in stores."

"So what? I don't care if he's a professional butler or not. I was planning to go to Kakei Dojo—what am I doing here? This isn't good. The moon..." Taichi cut off what he was about to say and gazed at the candles.

"I promised to help you find the dojo tomorrow. Why are you going there?"

"They built a dam, and the village I was living in was submerged behind it. So I came to the city yesterday."

"Submerged because of a dam? That's terrible. What about your family?"

"I had a grandmother, but she died last year. I have...no one else." Taichi looked lonely when he said this. Perhaps he was remembering his grandmother as he spoke.

When he saw Taichi's expression, Tomoe became misty-eyed. Even a sad expression on the young man's face was beautiful—at least to Tomoe.

"I'm sorry to have kept you waiting."

Hearing the butler's words, Tomoe placed a large wine glass in front of Taichi. With a serious expression, the butler filled Taichi's glass with sangria from the pitcher he was carrying.

"Um, that looks good. Grape juice mixed with orange juice. People who live in foreign countries sure do things differently."

Averting his face so that Taichi would not see, the butler smiled slightly.

"This is called sangria. It's an easy-to-drink wine—this is what they have in Spain." Impatiently, Tomoe held out his glass. "It's...not meant as an insult—I merely wanted you to feel more at home, so I thought this would be a suitable choice."

"You don't have to worry so much about me. Is this really alcoholic? It tastes just like juice." Without even so much as a toast, Taichi drained his glass in one gulp. The butler was no doubt correct. To this young man, an aged wine and a young wine were indistinguishable. "That's good!" As he finished the sangria, Taichi's face lit up.

At this, even the forbidding butler found himself smiling involuntarily. "I'm very pleased that it is to your taste. Would you like another glass?"

"Yes, thanks. If you made this, then I guess you really must be the best butler in the world," Taichi said, a bright expression on his face.

As Tomoe watched Taichi, he let out a long sigh. Like the rays of the sun, an aura of health and youth emanated from Taichi's body. And that wasn't all. Uniquely wild pheromones spilled from every pore of his freshly washed body.

"Dinner is served."

The appetizer was smoked duck and eggplant garnished with asparagus. Within five seconds, Taichi had cleared his plate and was crunching his way through the French bread. "This is really good. Do you like duck? There was this pond in my village, and ducks often landed there. Duck stew is good, too. The next time I go back...Oh. Wait. There's nothing there anymore."

Taichi had been talking happily, but once again his mood dimmed.

"The government paid for the land, correct?"

"The land belonged to the head of the family. I was from a different branch, so I just leased the land and built a home there."

"What kind of work did you do?"

"I sold charcoal—well, I made charcoal and caught and sold wild boar and birds. There weren't many young people in the village, so there was always work to do."

His scent was pure. Taichi must have lived in the mountain recesses all his life. Tomoe thought of the young men who worked for him at the boys' pub. They always smelled of alcohol, cigarettes, and additives. It was impossible to compare these young men, sullied by desire and greed, with Taichi.

"Kakei-san told the head of my family that he would give me a job. An interview—is that what you call it? I came here for an interview, so what am I doing in this house, eating dinner?”

“If you like, you can eat this too.” Tomoe handed his own plate over to Taichi.

“That’s your serving.”

“It’s okay; I don’t eat much.”

Tomoe drank some sangria. Normally, he would have scorned sangria as a cheap party drink, but somehow tonight, it seemed sweet and delicious.

“You...don’t you have any family?”

“No—I’m also alone.”

Tomoe casually indicated the old painting that was hanging on the dining room wall. The painting showed a beautiful Japanese woman and a distinguished British officer standing together in front of some western buildings in Meiji-era Japan.

“Are those your ancestors?”

“Yes. That’s Viscount Tomoe’s daughter, Satsukiko, and Warren Sanders, a British naval officer.” Tomoe’s face suddenly bore an expression of loneliness similar to Taichi’s.

“Viscount...so you’re an aristocrat. You look like them.”

“Thank you. I’m very proud of them.”

The woman in the picture looked very much like Tomoe, while the posture of the tall British naval officer was extremely similar to his. Although the two people in the picture must be long dead, they somehow seemed very much alive – young, bright, and full of laughter.

“Tomoe-san, don’t you have any brothers or sisters?”

“None.”

As Tomoe filled Taichi’s glass again, he shook off his gloomy mood.

Taichi gulped down the sangria as if it were juice. It seemed as though this man had no idea that he could get drunk.

Tomoe gazed rapturously at Taichi’s mouth as Taichi gulped down the excellent food and drink, murmuring, “He’s so full of vitality. It’s wonderful.”

“I’m sorry; this isn’t my house, and I’m behaving badly. I’m not usually like this.”

“Don’t hold back—Anthony is very happy to see a guest eating his food with such enjoyment.”

As though aware that he was being spoken about, the butler appeared at that moment with the main dish. It was a veal steak, lightly seared on top and nearly raw inside.

“Meat?” Taichi’s expression changed, and he swallowed hard. Perhaps he was salivating at the thought of the succulent flesh.

“Are you that hungry? Please, eat my share.”

Before Tomoe even finished the sentence, the meat had disappeared from his plate.

Tomoe poured scented oils into his bathwater and then soaked in the tub for a while. After getting out of the bath, he rubbed a specially scented lotion onto his already smooth skin. After brushing his teeth and using mouthwash, he ran a comb through his soft hair.

"Hmm. If I comb it back, it will make me look old. Perhaps leaving some down in front would look cuter. Cute...maybe I'm too old for cute."

As Tomoe dithered in front of his mirror, he didn't look at all like a twenty-eight-year old. In fact, he looked as if age had never touched him. But when he wore a suit, his calm demeanor made him look as if he were in his thirties. Impressions of him varied widely, depending on who was looking.

"What am I going to do? I promised Anthony that I would be a good boy, but I'm not sure I can keep that promise. I wonder...what *he* wants?"

Tomoe smiled. When he did this, the beautiful young man in the mirror returned a charming smile.

"I wonder if this kind of smile is still good in this day and age. Maybe I should smile more openly and lightheartedly."

He then attempted a suggestive laugh, one that a host in his boys' pub might use, but it really didn't suit him.

"I really don't want to use any more dirty tricks. I want him to want it. I suppose that's impossible. Because I'm a man, he probably won't have such feelings for me."

The beautiful youth in the mirror suddenly seemed stricken with sadness.

"I understand. I understand better than anyone. In any case, we won't be together long. It's just a transient love. Transient? I wonder what a more modern word would be? Impulsive? The sound goes up at the end of the word, doesn't it? The intonation is really difficult, and I never know where to put the subject. Japanese is such a confusing language."

At some point, his speech had turned to grumbling about unrelated matters. With a bitter grin, Tomoe looked in the mirror.

"I'll take him back after a day. That way, it'll be finished before anyone gets hurt. I'm fed up with having nothing but lonely memories after someone leaves."

Tomoe ran his fingers through his hair for a more natural look.

"Well, should I make my move while he's in bed? But in a gentlemanly fashion, of course. I must respect his wishes. I pray that he will like me just a little bit."

Tomoe stood tall in the mirror, crossed himself, and jauntily left the bathroom. He was headed for the guest bedroom, where Taichi was surely asleep. Tomoe knocked on the door, but there was no reply.

Extremely disappointed, he wondered, "Has he already fallen asleep?"

He should have given up, then; that would have indeed been gentlemanly. It was his lack of control that angered the butler so.

"Where's the harm? It's not like it's something I do all the time…"

Tomoe resolutely opened the door and entered the guest room, which was much smaller than the master bedroom. But Taichi was not in the bed.

Tomoe's first thought was that Taichi had fled, but he had ordered the butler to launder his clothes, and he couldn't imagine that Taichi had left the house with nothing on but his black leather jacket.

"Yamagami-kun..." He touched the bed softly. It was clear from the residual warmth that, until a short time ago, someone had lain in the bed.

"The windows?"

The heavy drapes were closed. Tomoe threw them open. On the other side of the window was a small terrace, from which it might have been possible to jump down to the garden. But when Tomoe tried to open the windows, he found that they were firmly locked.

"Locked. Then that means..."

Without thinking, he looked under the bed. But there was no way that a man that size could fit.

"Hmmm."

The only other possibility was the closet. Tomoe approached it and flung open the doors. Inside, Taichi had curled his large body into a ball.

"What are you doing in there?"

"Nothing."

"I'm not going to attack you—I just came to talk with you. Relax and come out of there." His manner suddenly became that of someone older.

Taichi merely raised his head a fraction and shook it violently back and forth. "Get out! It's best for both of us."

"Really? It seems you have guessed my motive, then."

"Motive?"

"I'm sorry. I'm no better than those bully boys from the bar. I've tried to deceive you, taking advantage of your innocence and ignorance. But it wasn't out of any evil plot. I know this may seem strange, but I believe I fell in love with you at first sight."

Tomoe sat down on the bed and combed his fingers through his disheveled hair.

Taichi refused to come out of the closet.

Tomoe lifted his face and gazed out the windows at the night sky. A beautiful moon was hovering between the stars, and to the lonely man, it seemed to be laughing at him.

"I'm not very healthy. When I look at you, such an energetic young man, I feel even more in love. The instant I laid eyes on you, I thought to myself, 'Such a beautiful young man.' I yearned for you. You are so full of life; you are simply overflowing with vitality. It's as though power is emanating from every pore of your body."

Ignoring Tomoe's confession, Taichi raised his voice in irritation. "Close the curtains!"

"The curtains? Why? The moon is beautiful tonight. It's already waning—I wonder when the full moon was? I thought it was around this time."

"Get out! If you don't get out now..."

The violence of Taichi's anger made Tomoe angry in turn. "That's no way to speak to your host, is it? You're being incredibly rude. The least you could do is talk with me."

"Please! Don't get too close to me!"

"You're cruel. I've never been refused so bluntly before. I don't have any designs on your virtue—I just wanted to savor the warmth of your body for one night."

Deeply depressed, Tomoe stood up. All of the energy had left his body. He understood. A healthy young woman was more suitable for such a young man. No matter how handsome Tomoe was, not all men would be attracted to him. Even if things somehow went well, it was not like they would be together forever. Even Tomoe was beginning to acknowledge that he couldn't continue this sterile lifestyle much longer.

"Why don't you leave? Why are you so eager to be attacked?" Taichi left the closet and glared at Tomoe. His eyes emitted a red glow, and Tomoe found he was unable to tear his gaze away.

"So beautiful...You're going to attack me? It's like a dream come true."

"If I do, I don't know what will happen to you."

"I know exactly what will happen—it's my body, after all," Tomoe said jokingly, but his heart began to race.

I could be attacked by this man. No, I could incite him to attack me. These thoughts made Tomoe's body hot—a very rare thing for him.

Taichi, too, seemed to sense and return the mood. Tomoe couldn't ask for a better development, but now that things were heating up, he found that he was a bit nervous after all.

"It's okay; you don't have to do anything you don't want to. You'd really prefer a woman, wouldn't you?"

"Argh! I can't...Shit! I can't ignore it anymore!" Taichi was already breathing hard. Taichi's gaze devoured Tomoe; it was like a hot flame licking every part of his body.

"Have you ever done it with a man? You haven't, have you?"

"Uh, urgh, argh!" Suddenly, Taichi leaped on Tomoe, pushing him down on the bed. He tore the viscount's pajamas. His eyes glowed scarlet.

"You're so violent!" Tomoe stiffened in shock. He had come to this room with just this goal in mind, but after all, there was a proper order to such things. At the very least, seduction should start with an intimate whisper or two, before slowly moving toward the bed. Those were the rules. He'd never been with such a wild man before. Did Taichi like things rough? Or was he just covering up his nervousness by acting so forceful?

"Please, calm down! I came here tonight to make love to you—there's no need to hurry."

Buttons went flying, and Tomoe's pajama bottoms were roughly yanked down.

"Wait! You don't have to go so fast. At least a kiss..."

"Hn." As though in answer to his request, Taichi's lips suddenly covered Tomoe's. It wasn't a brief kiss, either. It was as if he were trying to devour Tomoe.

"Mm...a little...more gently..."

"Mm...mm...mm."

Tomoe felt as though he were being embraced by the sun. Taichi's tongue moved intensely across his lips, his chin—his kisses seemed to strike at random.

"Ow!"

One of Taichi's teeth broke the skin on Tomoe's jaw. Perhaps the tooth was a bit pointed? Although the cut was shallow, it still hurt quite a lot.

"Please, slow down! I'm not going to run away!" Trying somehow to calm Taichi down, Tomoe placed his hand on the base of the young man's neck and whispered into his ear.

But Taichi knocked the hand away and pressed Tomoe's face against the bed.

Taichi was very heavy. Pressed down like this, Tomoe was unable to fight back.

"Mm. Guh. Ugh."

Taichi growled in a low voice. Having established dominance over Tomoe, Taichi seemed immensely satisfied. What had happened to that pure young man who had sat at his dining table?

Taichi leaned down to sniff at Tomoe's genitals and then began licking him. It was not the action of an inexperienced youth—he was more like a hungry animal.

"Ah—if you're going to go that far, could you at least do it more carefully...and gently?" But for all his protests, Tomoe was growing very excited. The fact that this was the first bout of sex he'd had in a long time played some part in his eagerness, but the truth was that he had never been taken so roughly. "Ah...aaah!"

At Tomoe's entreaties, the tip of Taichi's tongue began moving more slowly. Perhaps to make sure the entire area was slick, Taichi wet the tip of his tongue again and began licking Tomoe all over.

"Mm, that's incredible," Tomoe moaned, as if in a trance.

This was rough, masculine sex. Taichi was made to be on top. There was little doubt that this man would never be the type to seduce a lover with skillful words. But for Tomoe, such straightforward technique was far preferable to the kind of man who was all sweet words in bed, but then discarded a lover after he was finished.

"That's good, Taichi. You're wonderful." Tomoe tried using Taichi's name to get his attention, but there was no reaction. "Ah, it's just the way I thought it would be...I'm so glad!" As Tomoe again whispered sweet words, he suddenly felt something hot press into him; it felt as though it would split his body in two. He gasped in pain.

"Wait! I have lotion—it's rose-scented oil." But it was too late. Tomoe had forgotten how long it had been since he'd had sex. It was like the first time. As Taichi's hard, thick cock suddenly forced its way into Tomoe's tight, narrow passage, the damage done was considerable.

"Wait! Aaah! That's too...Aaah!"

"Be quiet! Shut up!" Words like "control" and "stop" obviously no longer registered in Taichi's mind.

When Tomoe tried to get away, Taichi just grabbed his hips and pumped harder. He didn't speak after that—all that escaped him were short, hard breaths.

Tomoe was also nearly wordless. The shock made him dizzy. "Uh...ah...ah...that hurts." For several minutes, Tomoe just withstood the pain, before he suddenly felt a gush of hot liquid deep inside.

Tomoe thought to himself, *Thank God. Now maybe he'll calm down.* But he underestimated Taichi.

Tomoe's passage was now slick, and when Taichi entered him again, the pain wasn't as bad. Clearly, Taichi wasn't about to let Tomoe go.

"What? Again?"

But there was no answer. Even without words, the condition of Taichi's body told the whole tale.

Tomoe's knees hurt, but he didn't think that Taichi would listen to any appeals to change his position.

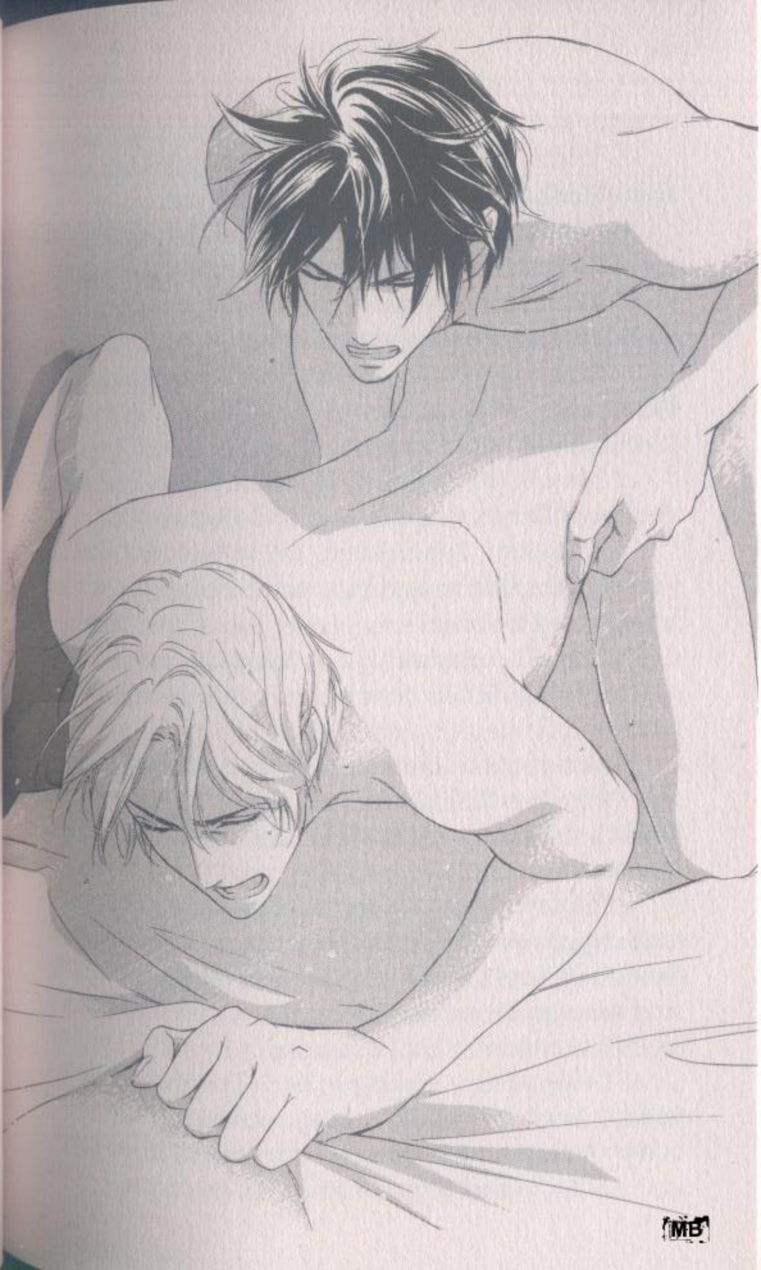
"Ah...ah." There was no time to ask anyway—Taichi began his savage thrusts again. Tomoe began to get a little angry. He'd been rejected at first, only to have things turn out like this. Taichi wasn't even thinking about Tomoe's pleasure at all. Even for a one-night stand with no love involved, this was a bit much.

"This is outrageous. How dare you treat me in such a way?! I'm not your sex doll!" Tomoe tried desperately to get away. But Taichi was all over him. It was, after all, a very narrow guest bed. Soon, Tomoe was pressed up against the wall. Taichi was so rough, Tomoe was afraid that the bed would break. Still Taichi seemed never to tire; his energy was unflagging.

"No, no! I don't want it like this!" But even as Tomoe cried out, his body slowly began to feel pleasure. His cock also began to rise.

"Hn...ah!" Although Tomoe wanted to stroke himself, it took all his strength just to support his own weight. As he felt Taichi reach another orgasm, his irritation grew. "That's so unfair—just to please yourself. Do something for me, please..."

Taichi's movements suddenly stopped, and his thick cock slipped out of Tomoe. Because of the amount of cum released into his body, it began to flow out of Tomoe, soaking his thighs. Reflexively, he tightened his



muscles and rolled over on his side.

Taichi stared down at Tomoe wordlessly. His shadow fell over Tomoe, concealing his expression.

"Don't you know any of the rules? If you screwed a woman like this, she'd hate you," Tomoe said angrily.

Taichi just growled in a low voice, but there were undertones of sadness in the sound.

"Sex is something that both partners should enjoy. What you're doing is just rape."

"I can't...I can't control myself."

Even in the darkness, Tomoe could make out the shadow of Taichi's sizeable and still-erect cock.

"It's okay. I understand. Do as you like. But try your very hardest to control yourself enough to at least let me enjoy it a little."

"Hn..." Apparently not knowing how to do anything else, Taichi once again began licking Tomoe all over.

"Look, you have to pay some attention here; that's how to satisfy a man." Skillfully, Tomoe directed Taichi's tongue to his cock. When he did so, Taichi devoured it hungrily.

"Slower. This is a surprise. You really don't know anything, do you?" Tomoe felt his anger slipping away. When he thought about it, an inexperienced young man who was unable to control himself and who acted purely on instinct was, in a way, endearing.

"Take it easy—biting is bad. That's right; that's good." Taichi's unskilled tongue eventually provided Tomoe with great pleasure, as evidenced by his words.

This seemed to reassure Taichi, as he once again looked away and asked hesitantly, "I...want to put it in again. Is it okay?"

"It's all right. But touch my cock this time."

"Uh...hn...I can't hold back; it feels so good." Taichi's cock slid easily into Tomoe's cum-slicked ass.

Tomoe guided Taichi's hand toward his own cock and told him, "Gently...You're just too strong for my own good."

"Oh..." Being very careful not to exert too much strength, Taichi stroked Tomoe and began moving inside him once again.

"That's it. This is something we can both enjoy."

"Oh...oh..."

Tomoe felt waves of pleasure inside. "Yes, that's it, right there. Move gently just there...That's it—more, give me more." Tomoe's legs twined around Taichi's waist as he gave himself over to the intense rhythm.

"That feels so good. I want to come inside of you again. How about you? Does it feel good to you too?"

"Hn...ah, it feels wonderful." Even so, Tomoe could not soon find release. Sadly, he was unable to come as intensely as Taichi. Meanwhile, Taichi occasionally remembered to pay attention to Tomoe, but often his hand would stop stroking for several moments. Then when he remembered again, he would get flustered, and his movements would become clumsy. Even though he was trying his best to respond to Tomoe's expectations, his lust kept getting the upper hand, and Tomoe found this, too, rather cute. It also made him think that he might be Taichi's first.

Tomoe realized that he was reverting to a familiar pattern. It was a habit that always angered his butler, who often said, "It's fine to fall in love, but you are the one who is always left behind in tears."

Even though he knew from the beginning that every relationship would end in grief, Tomoe couldn't help falling in love, over and over. If a relationship were short-lived, the pain would be less; Tomoe understood this, but somehow he was unable to carry out this plan. He wondered just how long Taichi would be able to engage his heart. Somehow, he thought he might be hopelessly devoted to the youth for a long time.

How many times had he come? Taichi was completely exhausted. He lay still, only his chest heaving as he tried to catch his breath. Outside, the sky was beginning to lighten. The moon had disappeared and the stars were winking out, one by one. Taichi was finally calm, and he released Tomoe from his hold.

With a grim expression on his face, Taichi spoke to Tomoe in a hoarse voice: "I'm very sorry. You've been nothing but kind to me, and I've done a terrible thing to you. Are you all right?"

"Don't worry—it was wonderful. You weren't very good at first, and I was a bit worried, but you improved a lot by the end," Tomoe answered Taichi, stroking his arm. "Was that your first time?"

"Yes. To tell the truth, my grandmother stopped me before. She said I shouldn't do it because I wasn't in control. She said I should never approach a woman in that way."

"You thought you could do it with me because I'm not a woman?" Tomoe asked somewhat sadly.

Taichi hurriedly denied this: "No, that's not it. Or, at least, that's not the only reason. You seemed very kind, and I'd never seen such a beautiful man before. When I was with you, I felt calm. I tried to control myself, but I just couldn't."

"I'm the one who invited you. You don't have to worry about it."

Taichi stood up, and then sat back down on the edge of the bed.

Tomoe, completely spent, could do nothing but gaze at his broad back. Once again, he protested. "It's really very rude to turn your back on me right after we're finished. Even if you don't want to leave, in thanks to your partner you should cuddle for at least five minutes afterward and speak kindly to him."

"I'm too ashamed to look you in the face. I've done such terrible things to you."

"If you want to make amends, pull those curtains closed and come back to bed. Hold me in your arms and let's sleep until evening."

"Curtains? Ah, but it's a beautiful dawn. Couldn't we watch it for a while?"

"I'm sorry, but I can't handle bright light. My eyes are weak." Tomoe pulled the blanket all the way over his face and turned his eyes away from the orange sky.

"I'm sorry."

Before drawing the curtains shut, Taichi opened the windows to let some fresh air in. The crisp fall breeze filled the room. The tang of the ocean mixed faintly with scents of autumn, replacing the smell of sex.

"It looks like it's going to be a beautiful day. On a day like this, it feels really good to go for a hike in the mountains. Your eyes are weak? That's too bad." After shutting the windows, Taichi pulled the curtains closed. He hesitated for a moment, but finally returned to the bed and lay down gingerly next to Tomoe. "I think I had better leave. As long as I stay here, I'll just cause you more problems."

"No. I won't be able to sleep unless you hold me."

"You're just saying that. How can you sleep well with a great lump like me next to you?"

"I'll sleep—trust me." Tomoe enveloped Taichi in the blanket.

"You're freezing!" Although he'd been unaware of it while they were making love, Taichi was suddenly surprised by the low temperature of Tomoe's body. "Are you unwell? If so, you shouldn't push yourself so hard. It feels like I was the only one who got anything out of last night, and I did it until I was sated. Are you tired? Your body feels like it's getting colder."

"Like I said—unless you hold me, I won't be able to sleep." Tomoe was already halfway asleep. Taichi obediently cradled Tomoe in his sturdy arms and pulled the blanket up to cover them both.

"It's okay; my body temperature is very high. If it means you won't be cold..."

"Thank you. You're...wonderful...I think...I might

be falling...in love..." Tomoe fell into such a restful sleep that Taichi couldn't be sure the man was even breathing.

Taichi, with traces of the night's excitement still coursing through his system, was unable to sleep, so he gazed at Tomoe's face for a while. Like his hair, his eyebrows and eyelashes were light-colored. The bridge of his nose was straight and high, but his nose wasn't too big. His lips were red and well-shaped. His mouth wasn't as small as a woman's, and the corners were always turned up.

Taichi had been very truthful with Tomoe. Living in the mountains as he had, he had never seen a more beautiful man. The villagers had always admired the village leader's son for his good looks, but once Taichi came to Yokohama, he realized that such looks were nothing out of the ordinary. Yokohama was overflowing with attractive men and women, but still, Tomoe stood out among them.

"What in the world does he see in me?"

Taichi began speaking to himself, revealing his true reason for coming to the city. "The headman said there were many people in the city who are 'different.' This man is certainly different."

It was certainly a novel experience to have been seduced by a man who was as unusual as Taichi himself, but Taichi didn't sense any danger, just wonder. Tomoe was by no means a weakling. Taichi had seen him send a man flying with ease. His body was solid and muscular, not at all soft, and there was nothing at all cowardly about him.

But he was very cold. Anywhere Taichi's body was touching him, he was slightly warm, but otherwise, it was just like holding a porcelain doll. Because Taichi's body temperature was so high, he didn't really experience it as cold, and he thought that sleeping next to Tomoe in the summer might actually be very comfortable. That's how low Tomoe's body temperature was. And yet the heater in the room was set to a moderate level. In fact, for someone more sensitive to the cold than Taichi was, the room would have felt quite chilly.

When Taichi moved the blanket fell away, partially uncovering Tomoe. It was the first time Taichi had ever held a sleeping person in his arms, and he wasn't sure what to do, so he just laid back and stared at the ceiling. Tomoe's hand touched Taichi's chest, and suddenly he felt happy. This stranger had not only given him a night of pleasure—his first night of pleasure—but he was now sleeping trustfully in Taichi's arms.

Outside, the sun must be shining brightly, and people would be going about their daily business. Taichi fought the temptation to leave the bed and go out; as he continued to warm Tomoe, he drifted off into a deep sleep himself.

His sleep was short, however. Before the clock struck noon, his empty stomach woke him up. Tomoe was still sleeping like the dead. Taichi was overcome with guilt as he thought that Tomoe's exhaustion must be due to the violence he had suffered at Taichi's hands the previous night.

He got out of the bed. He felt bad about it, but he really should leave. Tomoe had said kind things to him earlier, but he couldn't simply rely on this man's good will. Besides, Taichi figured that such kindness was a temporary thing. Their worlds were just too different. Tomoe had been full of curiosity at first, but as soon as he woke up, he would surely come to his senses and lose all interest in Taichi. Taichi was resigned to the thought that he had been chosen for merely a one-night adventure. He'd been given a wonderful and rare experience, and he would treasure it forever.

Taichi was afraid that if he got used to this comfortable life, he would be unable to leave, and he'd eventually become an unwanted burden. This thought made him very unhappy.

He put on the bathrobe and went downstairs. All of the heavy curtains there had also been drawn closed, probably for Tomoe's sake. The beautiful ocean view from the terrace was no longer visible. The gloomy room was very quiet. Taichi wondered what had happened to his clothes.

As he wandered about looking for them, he suddenly heard a voice address him from behind: "Are you looking for something?"

Taichi always knew when someone or something was approaching him from behind—he could sense the presence of a creature as small as a field mouse. But he hadn't sensed the butler at all. Tomoe was just the same. They were both like martial arts masters, able to move without making a sound.

"Thank you—I'm looking for my clothes. Do you know where they are?"

Facing the butler, Taichi found himself speaking more politely than usual. It was hard to imagine a foreigner could speak Japanese so well.

"I apologize for the presumption, but I've laundered them. I'll bring them to you right away. In the meantime, perhaps you'd like a shower?"

The butler's face was expressionless, but behind his polite words, Taichi thought he sensed a slight antagonism. The butler seemed to be obliquely referring to the night's activities.

"After you've finished your shower, I'll prepare breakfast."

"No, thank you. Really, I can't put you to any more trouble. I'm going home."

"I can't let you leave without Tomoe-sama's permission. I apologize, but please wait here until Tomoe-sama wakes up."

Taichi could have lied and said that Tomoe had told him to leave, or he could have just run away. But he was too honest for that. Taichi took a shower as the butler had suggested, put on his freshly laundered tank top and underwear, and pulled on his jeans, which had shrunk slightly in the washing machine. Then he went to the dining room and obediently ate the thick toast and huge omelet the butler had prepared for him.

"Would you prefer coffee or tea?" It was just like being waited on in a restaurant.

"Water will be fine. I'm just a country boy, and I haven't had many options for coffee or tea before, so I have no idea how to choose between them."

At Taichi's hesitant words, the butler nodded and produced a pitcher of orange juice.

After the orange juice was poured into a large tumbler, Taichi happily drained the glass. As he did so, the butler's gaze focused on his hand. The bandage the butler had placed there was gone, probably dislodged during the furious activities of the night before.

As the butler began to offer to put a new bandage on, he noticed that the wound itself had disappeared.

"Tomoe-sama won't wake up until very late. Would you like to wait in the living room, where you can watch TV? Or I could show you to the library where you can select a book to read."

Although Taichi had put himself down as a country bumpkin, he chose the library without hesitation. He preferred learning the truth from books to the imaginary reality of television.

"This way, please." The butler opened a door connecting to the living room and by doing so, showed Taichi paradise.

"Wow! This is amazing!" From floor to ceiling, bookshelves filled with neatly arranged books covered the walls. A ladder was available to reach the highest shelves. For some reason, ancient texts predominated, and many of them were Western books.

Taichi unthinkingly revealed his true feelings, blurting "This is just like heaven!"

As evening approached, the butler headed for the guest room instead of the master bedroom. On a silver tray, he carried a glass filled with an odd-looking red liquid. After knocking lightly on the door, the butler entered the guest room. Tomoe was still sound asleep, his beautiful face exposed.

The butler placed the glass on the bedside table and leaned down to whisper into Tomoe's ear: "Tomoe-sama, the sun has almost set."

"Hn...Anthony, don't yell at me for breaking my promise," Tomoe said in a small voice. His eyes slightly open, Tomoe slowly buried his face in the blanket.

"I have instructed Yamagami-sama to wait for you downstairs."

"Thank you, Anthony. Please listen, and don't get angry. I had an amazing night. He's inexperienced, but full of passion. I've never been loved so violently before." His face still hidden from the butler, Tomoe unabashedly confessed.

"I'd like to speak with you about that. Tomoe-sama, this man smells dangerous to me. I think you must keep your promise and end things with him now."

"Anthony, who's the master here?" Tomoe threw the blanket off and stood up, revealing his beautiful naked body to the butler.

But Anthony was used to this, and his expression didn't change. He continued speaking: "Tomoe-sama, I have no other master save you, which is precisely why I am saying this. He is not a normal man."

"Well, you can say that again. Six times...no, *seven times* in one night. There aren't many men who can get it up that many times in a row. From the beginning to the end, he was rock hard. It was really just incredible."

"Tomoe-sama, please think about this rationally."

"I am always rational." The light in his beautiful face dimmed, and Tomoe picked up the glass from the bedside table, downing the contents in one gulp. His marble-pale face took on a tinge of color.

"Are you calmer now?" The butler took the empty glass. "The wound Yamagami-sama had last night has completely disappeared."

Tomoe was quiet for a moment, lost in thought. When he finally did reply, it was an answer not worthy of such an educated man. "I suppose he just has a really fast metabolism. Or perhaps sex activated something in his immune system. It's not important."

"Tomoe-sama, even infants, with their faster metabolic rate, take at least two or three days to heal. For a wound like that to just disappear..."

"Don't be a fool! He's a normal man. He has larger appetites for both food and sex than the average fellow, but when he's relaxed, he's a gentle, naïve young man. Did he try to steal the silver or something?"

Tomoe moved away from the bed as though his fatigue from the night before had never existed. He picked up his torn pajamas.

Anthony saw the shredded clothes for the first time. "It's very rare for you to be the one attacked."

With the evidence in plain sight, Tomoe was unable to refute those words. "It doesn't matter. In the end, he was very gentlemanly."

"I'll bring you a bathrobe. Please wait a moment." The butler turned to leave the room but stopped and asked, "If he isn't human, what do you suppose he is?"

"Who knows? Japan is an ancient country. It wouldn't surprise me if there are many strange creatures out there that we still know nothing about. What does it matter anyway? If he's of a gentle nature; I don't really care how strange he is. After all, I myself..."

The butler's expression turned sad. "I understand that you are lonely. It grieves me endlessly that I can be of no help."

"Anthony, we've been over this before, and it's no use. I love you, but the only one who can relieve my loneliness is a young man who burns like the sun."

"I just don't want to see you cry. Perhaps Yamagami-sama is a good man. He's reading quietly in the library now, but if you dawdle, it wouldn't surprise me if he left on his own."

"You're right! I mustn't leave him alone!" Tomoe tore a sheet from the bed and wrapped it around himself like a Roman toga before dashing toward the bathroom in the master bedroom. If he didn't hurry, Taichi might leave. That was Tomoe's greatest fear. Tomoe no longer had any plans to let that pure young man go after a one-night stand. It was very convenient that Taichi had no family and nowhere to live, and that he hadn't yet decided on a job. To Tomoe, it was as though fate had taken pity on his loneliness, and had sent a companion his way.

"That's it—he and I are tied together by destiny." He always thought this when meeting someone new, but the truth was, only a few of those encounters had not ended tragically. Despite this, whenever Tomoe met someone, hope sprang up in his heart.

"He's a violent man." Dropping the sheet, Tomoe gazed at himself in the mirror. His pale body was covered with bite marks and bruises. A normal man probably wouldn't have been able to calmly take a shower after seeing this. His back would ache, and he wouldn't be able to have anal sex for days. But Tomoe just washed himself cheerfully under the hot shower.

He didn't think that Taichi's wound healing in a day was all that remarkable, because the truth was, he was the same way. Once he had slept, his exhaustion was gone, and his drink had put new life into him.

"He's not exactly the same as me." Tomoe washed himself with a bar of the finest-quality soap and applied rose-scented lotion to the area that had been so violently used the night before. His long sleep had restored his body to such an extent that it looked like he was a virgin. The area his finger touched was a rosy-pink hue, as though the activity of the night before had never happened. The bite marks and bruises were also beginning to fade.

But Tomoe did have one vulnerability—the sun. The sun was forbidden to him.

"He loves the sun. So he's not like Anthony and I. I wonder what he is?" Standing in front of the mirror again, Tomoe inspected his face. There were no bags under his eyes, his cheeks glowed, and his lips were pink. Tomoe looked youthful and healthy.

"You're beautiful today, Akihiro Tomoe. You don't look at all like you're one hundred twenty years old."

Tomoe had been born during the Meiji period. Time had stopped for him when he was twenty-eight years old. Ninety-two years had passed since that day. Born Hiroaki Sanders Tomoe, the son of Viscount Tomoe, Tomoe had changed his name to Akihiro. His mother and father were long gone, and the first man he'd ever loved had died many years ago. Time continued to stand still. But Tomoe was not a spirit. If he breathed, he could maintain a slight body temperature, and eating was possible. Sexual desire was, of course, still present.

The greatest difference between Tomoe and normal humans was the fact that if he did not drink human blood combined with his juice, he could not survive.

As was his custom every morning, Tomoe spoke to his reflection in the mirror. "Vampire is such a disgusting name. Their reflections don't show in mirrors, and they hate crosses. That's certainly not me." Tomoe made the sign of the cross, looked at the beautiful young man reflected in the mirror, and smiled.

"Even without a stake in the heart, I will eventually die. It's just that I will live about three times longer than normal people. Why can't I just enjoy life while I am alive? I have never attacked a single human being. I'm just a gentle, harmless creature."

Tomoe put on a white silk shirt and a dark burgundy suit. Instead of a necktie, he tied an Ascot scarf around his neck. "This style isn't very popular now, I suppose, but I still like it. I think it will do." He strapped a fifty-year-old gold Piaget watch around his wrist.

"If Taichi knew what I drank every day, he'd probably run away too. Probably...Pig's blood is an ingredient in sausage, and no one thinks that's weird, but if he knew that I bought and drank blood..." The beautiful young man in the mirror looked sad again.

"If I fall in love, I am the one who will be hurt. Even though I understand that, when I see a young man who is suited to sunlight, I can't help but be attracted. Even if it's only vicarious, I just want to experience a pleasure I can no longer enjoy. Is that so bad? Should I not fall in love with him? In all of my years, I've never seen a more beautiful young man."

You always say the same thing, Tomoe's reflection seemed to say. He hurriedly moved away from the mirror.

Love was always fleeting. How many times had he fallen in love so far? It never lasted. No matter how much he loved the other person, after about ten years, his unchanging appearance began to raise questions. His lovers were suspicious also, because he could only see them at night. Breaking up was always difficult. Each time he wept; he felt that the sadness would break him. But the pain was soon forgotten, and the search for a new lover quickly began. Tomoe took this as a sign that he had not yet met his one true love.

If he could just find that love, perhaps his wandering spirit could finally find a home.

He alternated between England and Japan, moving every twenty-five years. This was to avoid awkward questions if he ever ran into an old acquaintance. But Tomoe was sick and tired of this lifestyle. He longed to be able to tell someone the truth. What would Taichi think? Would he choose a man who never grew old as a lover? He was a strange young man. Perhaps, Tomoe thought, Taichi's reaction would be different than that of the ordinary men he had known until now.

With great anticipation, Tomoe headed toward the living room, walking light-heartedly. It was late autumn, and the sun was setting early. The butler had already opened the curtains, and the gorgeous night view filled the room.

"Taichi..."

The man Tomoe thought so beautiful was now asleep on the sofa; the book he'd been reading lay open on his stomach, which was softly rising and falling.

"If only I had the power to stop time for you, as well...It's too bad that I don't have the powers legend associates with vampires," Tomoe murmured sadly to himself as he took the hand that had been wounded the night before.

Taichi's eyes shot open and he started up in surprise. The book went flying. It was a paperback entitled *The Truth About Folklore.*

"I'm sorry to have kept you waiting. I have to sleep longer than most people to maintain my health." Tomoe pulled Taichi's hand toward him and kissed it, just like a gentleman kissing the back of a lady's hand.

"I...I'm sorry. I was just going to say goodbye and go home."

"Go home? But I promised to take you to your friend's house. Shall we have dinner first?"

"No, if it gets much later, I..." Taichi stood up hurriedly and tried to straighten his clothes. He was blushing bright red to the tips of his ears, and Tomoe understood that having his hand held somehow embarrassed him.

"If I stay here any longer, I'll just make trouble again."

"Is there some reason that it is inconvenient for you to stay late at night? Kakei-san runs a school, right? So it wouldn't be rude for you to show up there late." Tomoe showed no intention of letting Taichi's hand go. Not only that; at some point, he had closed the distance between them and was now standing very close to Taichi.

Taichi peered down at Tomoe with a look of consternation on his face.

Tomoe was unable to control himself; he was in a delirium. After a good day's sleep, he was ready to approach Taichi again.

After taking a deep breath, Taichi began speaking in a low voice: "I don't know whether you will believe this, but when the moon is out, my emotions become uncontrollable. I believe that my unforgivable actions yesterday were because of this."

"I don't want to hear such things. It's very rude of you to say that the moon's power was stronger than my charms. Even if it's a lie, please tell me that you were overcome by me."

"Well, that part is true, but..."

"So unless the moon is out, you're a gentlemanly, knowledgeable man."

Taichi stated clearly, "This is the real me." The air of an intellectual hung about him. His expression was the complete opposite of the wild face he had shown Tomoe last night. "I'd like to get to Kakei's place before the moon rises. I need to speak with him while I still have the ability to reason. I made a mistake yesterday, and I thank you for helping me."

Tomoe nodded his head, but he still had no intention of letting Taichi get away. "If that's the case, then I understand. We'll leave dinner for later. I know where the dojo is—the truth is that I knew where it was all along, but I wanted to have you all to myself." Tomoe laughed slyly and started walking, still holding Taichi's hand. "Anthony. We'll eat out. Please prepare the best vodka for our return."

As Tomoe called him, the butler appeared out of nowhere and placed a coat in Tomoe's empty hand. "Please take care. Tonight is supposed to get rather chilly."

"Chilly? In that case, I'll borrow some of Taichi's warmth. His body is as warm as his heart."

Tomoe's mood had improved even further, and as he walked with Taichi toward the garage, he snuggled close and smiled. But no matter how smooth he acted, Tomoe still could not shake his fear of losing Taichi—it was like being in love for the first time.

One evening: tonight. One day: tomorrow. That was as far as Tomoe could put off their separation.

"Your wound healed overnight—you have a marvelous constitution, don't you?" As they got into the car, Tomoe was finally forced to let go of Taichi's hand.

"It's the way I was born. I always thought that was normal, but I guess not." Taichi himself didn't seem to question this circumstance, and Tomoe wondered what kind of upbringing he'd had that he would think rapid healing was commonplace. He longed to question the young man further, but decided to leave it for later.

Unlike the day before—when Taichi had cowered in the Jaguar—today, he got into the car confidently and fastened his seatbelt. "This is a very nice car. I guess a car like this is okay in the city."

"What about you? Do you have a car?"

"I don't have a license. My grandmother didn't want me to leave the village."

"Why not get your license now? There are no obstacles anymore, are there?"

"I don't have any money," Taichi said this without hesitation, as though he wasn't embarrassed by the fact. "In the village, I didn't really need money to survive, so I didn't think about it very much."

"You didn't feel any want?"

"I didn't, although I did mourn the lack of a good library. If I went down the mountain, there was a large town. When I went there to buy things, I'd go to the bookstore and the library without telling my grandmother. I enjoyed that."

Just going by outward appearances, Tomoe would not have guessed that Taichi loved books. He reached out a hand and lightly tugged on Taichi's hair. "Your hair's too long. It makes you look uncivilized. I think you should cut it."

Taichi remained docile. It seemed that he didn't have the courage to look Tomoe in the eyes. He was like a whimpering stray dog that had suddenly become attached to a new owner.

Tomoe smiled, thinking that wasn't such a bad development.

"Why are you hiding your face? You're very handsome."

"No, I'm not. When I lose my temper, my expression becomes terrible. I don't want to frighten you."

"I'm not frightened. You should have more self-confidence. You like books, so you have an intellectual side to be proud of." Tomoe was determined to keep Taichi, so he gently stroked and praised the young man, as if he were trying to win over a dog.

"I was surprised to find so many books in your home—just like in a library."

"You can read them anytime you want. What kind of books do you like? If you don't find anything of interest, I can order more."

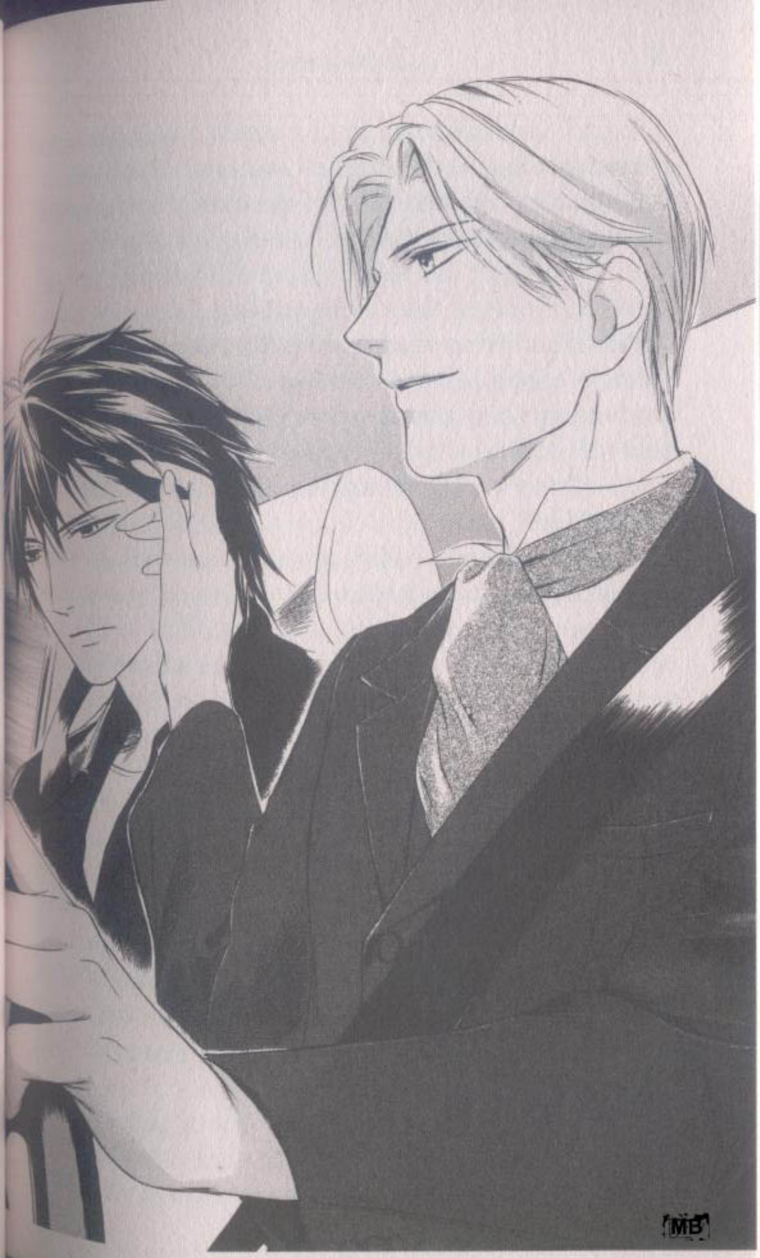
"I don't even know what books I should read. I...would like to find out how I am different from humans."

Tomoe blinked. "You're aware that you are different from humans?"

"Yes. This is the first time I've really been away from the mountain since I was born; I think maybe someone like me should live alone there, after all."

A tiny sliver of fading sunlight lit up the western sky. Stars were already twinkling, but the neon signs drowned them out. Somehow, the evening scenery seemed melancholy, and Taichi continued talking sadly: "My grandmother said over and over that I shouldn't interact with people. But I can't help longing for company."

"I understand. I absolutely understand your



feelings." Tomoe refused to give up on love, and so he understood Taichi's feelings all too well. But Taichi's situation was even more tragic—he didn't have a butler and employees to keep him company.

There were others like Tomoe scattered around the world. Many of them were wealthy, and for the sake of the others living near them, saw to the manufacture of their special "juice" so that they could all live comfortably. With this assistance, vampires like Tomoe were able to live without needing to attack humans.

"Didn't you have any friends or companions in your village?"

"The villagers didn't come near me unless they needed my help, but sometimes when I had to go outside to help someone, they were kind to me. The head of my household and his family sometimes helped me when I needed it. If not for the dam, I would still be living alone in the village."

"That's too lonely to even think about."

Tomoe remembered one of the parties held by others of his kind; the event occurred once every ten years in an old castle in Europe. The faces of those present at the parties didn't change much as the decades passed; it was possible for a while to feel secure and not so out of the ordinary. He wanted to be able to give Taichi the same experience. To do so, he thought he would need to tell Taichi the truth about himself, but it wasn't an easy confession to make.

If Taichi knew the truth about Tomoe, he might begin to fear him, and that would be the end of everything. No matter how academically advanced

people became, their fear of the unknown remained. Taichi, who was raised in the mountains, was probably subject to many superstitions. First of all, Tomoe wanted to know if Taichi, who seemed to have no fear of the city, was actually afraid of anything at all.

Tomoe turned the car into his parking space near the pub. It was still early, and none of the staff were there yet. Tomoe found it very easy to bend the young men who worked for him to his will. All he had to do was press on their carotid arteries and whisper his orders into their ears, and they would do exactly as he wished. He had used this once with Taichi, but it had taken far more energy than usual. Taichi's body concealed some unknown strength that Tomoe had yet to understand.

As he walked beside Taichi, Tomoe gazed at his neck—his thick, sturdy neck. The carotid artery was where the freshest blood flowed. If Tomoe were a vampire such as the ones described in legend, he would sink his fangs into that artery and absorb Taichi's energy through his life's blood. But Tomoe was only able to drink the blood of women. Why this was so, Tomoe himself did not know. Men's blood was bitter, and his body would not accept it. His compatriots often laughed at him because of this. They said they could see right through him—he needed to completely separate his appetite for food and his sexual appetites. Tomoe thought they were very rude to laugh, and he had been somewhat angry at the time, even though he acknowledged that they were right.

Before becoming what he now was, Tomoe's romantic partners had always been men. Perhaps that was why he could now only drink women's blood. When he looked at women, he sometimes felt the urge to make their acquaintance. He would gently embrace them, all the while gazing at their carotid arteries, but that was the most he could do.

In any case, Tomoe didn't have fangs, and he had never taken blood directly from a human being.

"Kakei Dojo—there it is."

A large sign advertising Kakei Dojo hung on the side of a bar. There was a small entrance next to the bar, and this led to the karate dojo. Because it was impossible to make a living as a mere karate instructor, the master of Kakei Dojo had opened the bar as a side business. A large red paper lantern hung beside the entrance to the bar, and boxes full of supplies were stacked next to the door, in preparation for the beginning of business. A very large young man was carrying boxes into the store. When Tomoe thought of Taichi working here, his brow furrowed.

Tomoe felt the urge to touch Taichi's carotid artery immediately and tell him that this was not the place he should work, and that he should work at Tomoe's pub. But Tomoe truly did not want to use this power on Taichi again. There wasn't a breath of corruption from Taichi, and Tomoe didn't want to soil the young man's pure heart.

"Taichi, do you mind if I go in with you?" Tomoe asked. "The world is not quite the beautiful place you think it is. In the city, people can demonstrate good will while planning your downfall at the same time. I have the ability to tell right away if someone is lying. There's no disadvantage to having me with you."

Taichi looked uncomfortable and asked, "But how will I introduce you?" He didn't know how to explain their relationship. They weren't friends, and they certainly weren't mere acquaintances, either. They hadn't been together long enough to be called proper lovers.

"Just tell them that I'm a consultant you met through a friend. Consultant is one of the vaguest words you can use. No one will ask for more details." Tomoe grinned at Taichi.

If Taichi was offered a job, Tomoe planned to point out all of the disadvantages to working there, so that Taichi would no longer want the position. If Taichi was aware of Tomoe's motives, he still didn't refuse Tomoe's request. Perhaps the previous night had been a good learning experience.

"Excuse me, my name is Yamagami. Is Kakei-san here?"

"Yes?" The man who lifted his face in response must have been Kakei. He looked to be in his fifties, but the arms extending from the sleeves of his *happi* coat were very muscular. He had short hair and a beard. He looked exactly like the master of a dojo should. "Hey, so you're Yamagami-kun, the bear killer. When you didn't show up yesterday, I figured you must have gotten lost."

The sociable man smiled widely at Taichi, and Tomoe felt his heart sink. The aura the owner gave off was that of an extremely friendly man. There was no doubt that he was a good man.

"Would you like a beer? Who's that with you?"

Tomoe answered without hesitation: "My name is Tomoe and I'm a management consultant. I'm here today as Taichi's advisor."

Kakei seemed to be the type who didn't think about things too deeply; he accepted Tomoe's words at face-value and invited the two to sit at a low table.

"I've heard about you from your village headman, Sanjo-san. He says you rescued your grandmother from a bear when she was gathering mushrooms. I've never heard of anyone taking on a bear with their bare hands. I really wanted to meet you. You've got a great body—there's nothing wrong with it at all."

The karate master pounded Taichi on the shoulder in a congenial way while laughing openly. As Tomoe listened, his expression clouded over. If this man offered Taichi a job, how could Tomoe prevent the young man from accepting? Looking around him, he could see that most of the employees were about Taichi's age and of the same general build. In an age where it was not possible to make a living by teaching the martial arts alone, Kakei offered some of his students jobs in the bar to make ends meet.

"Do you know the UHO—the mixed martial arts association?" Kakei poured beer for his two guests as he spoke. He was waiting for an affirmative answer.

Taichi answered honestly, "I don't watch TV, so I don't know much about such things."

Kakei narrowed his eyes. "Even in the remotest areas of the mountain you can still get TV reception."

"My grandmother didn't like such things."

"Is that so? Is it possible, then, that you don't know the legendary wrestler Kumamoto? He's the head of UHO."

"I'm very sorry, but I really don't know anything about it."

Tomoe looked at the apologetic Taichi and felt relieved. Even though he spent so many years away from Japan, Tomoe was very familiar with all the happenings there. It was necessary to keep up so that he could juggle the family register and maintain a social life when in the country. Even Tomoe know about Kumamoto. Perhaps he didn't have to worry.

"Kumamoto is looking for a martial arts fighter. I'd like you to practice here for a while, and if I think you will do, I'll introduce you to him. You can practice in the afternoon and work in my bar at night. I'll feed you all that you can eat. How about it?"

At these words, Taichi's face took on a thoughtful expression. Tomoe immediately turned to Kakei and asked, "So, in other words, you think Yamagami-san should become a mixed martial arts fighter?"

"It's too soon to say for sure, but that's the idea. According to Sanjo-san, Taichi-san also killed a wild boar with his bare hands. And Sanjo-san said he could carry large stones easily. He said Taichi-san was an amazing man and would become the talk of Japan."

Tomoe looked at Taichi, wondering if this was all true. He supposed it was. If it wasn't the complete truth, Taichi would be denying it by now.

Tomoe whispered into Taichi's ear, "Yamagami-san, listen to me. Martial arts matches are often held at night."

"I understand what martial arts are, but...is he talking about fights like those held in the Colosseum of

Rome?" Taichi looked at Tomoe questioningly.

Tomoe laughed softly and nodded. How wonderful Taichi was. He had no idea what televised martial arts matches were, but he was familiar with historical facts like the fights at the Colosseum. Although he realized that the timing was inappropriate, Tomoe felt cheerful. He could teach Taichi a lot. If only he acquired the worldly knowledge to go along with his natural intelligence, Taichi could become a splendid man. He obviously had the desire to learn—even in the mountains, he had gone behind his grandmother's back to read books. He wasn't like other young people his age, who, despite being given the remarkable chance to study at a university, preferred to spend their time playing games. Tomoe wanted to keep Taichi close and see to his education. He began to pray for the opportunity in earnest.

"If you are a strong fighter, you can even appear in commercials—you can make a lot of money."

As Kakei spoke, Tomoe noted a dark disturbance appear in his otherwise pure aura. It seemed that even a friendly man like Kakei was tempted by the thought of money.

"You'll be fighting in front of a lot of people. Of course this is a sport, but it's also a form of exhibitionism. Will you be able to perform in front of people like that? Not just hundreds of people, but tens of thousands of people."

Tomoe ignored Kakei and played his trump card: "You'll be fighting strangers in front of tens of thousands of people. And not just that; you'll have to make contracts with many different people, make conversation with them, and go out drinking with them. Even on nights when the moon is out."

"I can't!" Taichi jumped up at Tomoe's words. "Kakei-san, I'm very sorry, but I can't accept your offer."

Taichi bowed to Kakei and hurriedly began to put on his shoes in preparation to go. "Tomoe-san, I'm leaving."

"I understand." Tomoe also began calmly putting on his shoes.

"Hold on—what's going on here? You said you are his advisor—are you sure you're not a scout for another organization?" Kakei approached Tomoe, a dangerous expression on his face.

Tomoe continued to stir things up. "He's a pacifist and doesn't want to engage in meaningless fights with strangers."

"What are you talking about? Martial arts are a way to measure a man's strength. It's not just for the money. Men want to be the strongest. Don't try to pull the wool over this young man's eyes with your empty talk of pacifism," Kakei objected vigorously. His irritation was clear.

Tomoe knew that his presence often brought out uneasiness in people. This was particularly true for people like Kakei, who was trained in the martial arts and seemed to have a sixth sense about him. Such people had good instincts, like wild animals. Of course, if Tomoe were in an amicable mood, he could easily suppress such uneasiness, but Kakei was trying to take his beloved Taichi away, and so he was an enemy.

With a cold smile on his beautiful face, Tomoe spoke in such a way as to exacerbate Kakei's irritation: "You are the one trying to fool him. You think that you can make him a star and then make a lot of money off of him. You and others like you would be like ants swarming around a piece of fallen candy."

"You bastard! Are you disrespecting this house of martial arts?!"

Usually, if Kakei had been told to calm down and listen, things might have ended calmly, but Tomoe wanted to goad him into disgrace in front of Taichi.

Kakei grabbed Tomoe by his coat collar. The fine wool of Tome's expensive coat was crushed in Kakei's fist. "Even if I have heard that he killed a bear, I haven't seen his real strength for myself. I was just offering to help him train. And for that, you compare me to an ant?!"

Taichi stepped between Tomoe and Kakei. "Kakei-san. You're wrong to be angry at Tomoe-san. I didn't know anything and just came here because I heard there was work. The real problem is that I can't work at night. That's why I turned you down."

"Taichi, this man is not an appropriate teacher for you to train under. All you did was politely refuse him, and you see how violently he reacted. Who knows what would happen?" Tomoe surreptitiously placed his hand on the base of Kakei's neck and thought, *Let go*.

Involuntarily, Kakei's hand released its grip and he pushed Tomoe away.

"Tomoe-san, let's leave now." Taichi wore a determined expression. When Tomoe saw this, he again became lost in his thoughts. Taichi reminded him of a knight of old, protecting his liege lord, intensely loyal. He did as Taichi had requested and left the building.

Tomoe did not consider himself wrong for using such dirty tactics. Tricks or no tricks, Kakei had probably intended to use Taichi to satisfy the desire for money that was concealed deep within his heart. But what about himself? Tomoe's desire to have Taichi love him was selfish too, wasn't it? Wasn't he just using Taichi to bury his own pain?

"We'll both enjoy ourselves. That is the proper way of loving someone," Tomoe murmured to himself.

The sound of something breaking came from inside the store. It sounded like Taichi had sent Kakei flying. In order to protect Tomoe, Taichi had destroyed his chances with Kakei. Tomoe felt great relief and gave silent thanks to the moon, which hadn't yet fully risen.

After they ate dinner, Tomoe invited Taichi to accompany him to the park. In the sky, the moon was just a thin sliver.

"Tomoe. You're a cruel man." Taichi had not spoken until now, and his voice was suddenly very different. In addition, his gaze had sharpened, and there was no more hesitation to his manner.

Tomoe found this sudden transformation fascinating. "Am I cruel?"

"You knew what showing me the moon would do—you must have learned that lesson pretty thoroughly yesterday."

"I first knew you at night. I guess that this version of you is the one that seems more natural to me."

On the park benches, lovers were sitting shoulder to shoulder, looking out at the bay. Involved in their own relationships, none of them noticed the two men walking through the park.

"Isn't it about time that you told me your secret?" Tomoe asked.

"There's nothing to talk about. I just change when the light of the moon hits me. The moon's less than half-full now, so it's not too bad."

"What are you like when the moon is full, then?" Tomoe moved lightly over the cold ground, making very little sound.

"The full moon...During the full moon it feels as if all of the blood in my body is boiling. I become violent, and I feel like the king of the world. Sometimes I wish I could go completely mad, and then I wouldn't be troubled afterward, but some part of me is always aware. Sometimes I can compose myself. It's a burden."

"I see. I didn't notice much composure yesterday," Tomoe said teasingly.

Taichi suddenly grabbed him and pulled him close. "I don't understand your true feelings. Why would you want to hang out with a weirdo like me?"

"You may be weird, but you are very beautiful in both mind and body. You've never fallen in love at first sight, so you probably can't understand." As if in invitation, Tomoe placed his hand on Taichi's chest. He could feel the man's heart pounding rapidly.

"You have money. You're refined. Why doesn't a man like you have a real boyfriend?"

"You're real, aren't you?" Tomoe put his arm around Taichi's neck, silently asking for a kiss.

"Don't tempt me. As I am now, I would have no problem ripping your clothes off right here." Taichi pushed Tomoe away roughly.

The total contrast between the gentleman Taichi had been that afternoon and his current wild state was exciting. Tomoe approached Taichi again and wrapped his arms around the young man. "It would be a little awkward if you tore my clothes off here, but I wouldn't mind if you did it in my room."

Even though Tomoe said this lightly, Taichi remained serious. "You're a riddle. That interests me."

"A riddle? What do you mean?"

"I've been watching you since yesterday. You've barely eaten anything. I'm not saying that you should eat as much as I do, but it would be normal for you to eat about half that. But even in the restaurant, you gave all of your food to me."

"I have a small appetite." Tomoe tried to charm Taichi with an inviting smile, but such things didn't work very well on Taichi in his current state.

"That's not all. You can manipulate other people's minds at will. You did it to me, and you did it to Kakei, too."

"You are very hard to handle under moonlight, aren't you?"

Their positions seemed to have been reversed.

Now Taichi was clearly the superior. Without pause, Taichi fired question after question at Tomoe:

"Kakei is a master of the martial arts. You know there's no way he would normally be so easily rattled?"

"Kakei-san is still inexperienced."

"You didn't have to use tricks like that. I would never want to make a public spectacle of myself. Don't you know anything about martial arts?"

"I'm sorry—I guess I got a little ahead of myself." Tomoe found himself apologizing. For many, many years, he had not seriously apologized to anyone except his butler. Apologizing meant that he recognized the flaws of his actions.

Taichi spoke very straightforwardly: "I get that you wanted to show Kakei in a bad light, but don't bring other people into this unnecessarily."

As Tomoe was scolded, he once again became lost in his thoughts. "Wonderful. I think you're really cute when you're not under the influence of the moon, but...I think I'm really falling for your night-self."

"No, it's no good. I'm going home to the mountains."

"But why?"

"I don't even understand what's going on half the time, myself—being around a guy like you would just make things more complicated. And I don't think I can ever fall in love with a human. As my grandmother said, it's better if I live alone on the mountain."

"When your personality changes, the way you think changes too. Until a while ago, you were acting like you wanted to stay with me."

"That's because I'm weak when I'm like that. No matter how much I wanted to be a good boy and study, during the day, I just don't have the ability. I'm doing well if I can just be average."

Tomoe scolded Taichi in return: "You shouldn't talk about yourself like that. If you study more things, you could become a truly wonderful man. You mustn't deny your potential."

Taichi just laughed. "Tell that to my day-self. I'll be fine on my own, got it? Don't use funny tricks to try to tempt me."

"Is it so wrong to try to tempt you?"

"Pick better companions."

"You don't have any interest in me." Suddenly, Tomoe dropped Taichi's hand and stopped dead in his tracks. "I see. If that's the case, why didn't you just say so? Excuse me, Yamagami-san. I will take my leave here. Please forgive me for deserting you on this moonlit night."

Tomoe turned on his heel and began walking toward his car. It had been easier than he thought to end things. For Tomoe, there was nothing more to be said if Taichi was not interested in him. He thought things had ended too quickly, actually; but above all else, he hated to be hurt. If he were any more insistent, he was afraid that Taichi would begin hurling accusations of abuse at him, and he couldn't bear that. Running away now was better.

"He said he wanted to go home many times. I'm the one who stopped him." As he walked to the car, Tomoe muttered to himself: "And he saw through the tricks I used on Kakei. He's so pure; he probably thought that I was a coward. I suppose that this is divine justice." Tomoe maintained a stiff upper lip. He wanted to cry, but there was no time. As soon as he was in his own bed, he would bury his face in his pillow and weep. That was the proper way to grieve. Crying in the street was too effeminate—it was something he had never done.

"Well, this one was short—was it the shortest ever? No, some of my relationships ended before we even slept together. This one was a little better than that." Tomoe got into the Jaguar and turned on the engine. He had never turned on the heater—he preferred to enjoy the cold night air, although he didn't like snow or rain.

"I love Japan's dry winters," Tomoe murmured to himself has he drove the car. His home was nearby. He parked the car, and was getting out when the tears began to fall. "This is so pitiful. These tears should dry up as you get older. Buck up, Akihiro. Forget about that savage with the split personality. You can probably find someone much better working at your own bar."

Tomoe wiped his tears away on the sleeve on his coat, and again started to get out of the car. As he did so, the neighborhood dogs began barking noisily. It was a rare occurrence, and Tomoe wondered if something had happened. As Tomoe turned toward the front door, he suddenly realized why the dogs were barking—somehow, Taichi was already standing there. He had beaten the car there, but he wasn't even breathing hard. He was leaning casually against the front door as though he had just gotten out of a car himself.

"Did you forget something?" Tomoe asked. His hand, which had been reaching for the intercom, stopped in midair.

"I thought you were the type who enjoyed playing games." Taichi reached out and took the hand Tomoe had extended toward the intercom. After kissing the viscount's hand as Tomoe had kissed his earlier, Taichi searched Tomoe's face. "If you were able to leave me so easily, you couldn't have formed much of an attachment to me."

"You've never experienced real heartbreak, so you can't possibly understand."

"You were crying, weren't you?"

"And if I was?"

Taichi leaned against the door, blocking Tomoe's exit. He then took Tomoe's hand and again began kissing it.

"What are you doing? I thought you were going home? Why are you doing this?"

Just the touch of Taichi's lips on his hand filled Tomoe with sweet expectation. When he remembered last night, heat seemed to spread throughout his body.

"You were very cruel, so this is payback."

"Cruel?"

"You made me go on a walk in the moonlight."

"You're so conceited. Do you think I was sad just because you said you were going home?" Tomoe tried to pull his hand back, but Taichi pulled harder, tugging Tomoe into an embrace.

"You should value yourself a little more. I could have left this house anytime I wanted to. Why do you think I waited patiently all day for you to wake up?"

"Lies and games don't suit you." Tomoe raised his eyes to Taichi's and just melted. It was an old-fashioned way to put it, but "melting" was the only expression he could think of that fit the situation. It was rather unfortunate, but wild-Taichi was just Tomoe's type. He should find the young man overbearing and arrogant, but when Taichi used force, Tomoe was unable to resist.

As though reading Tomoe's mind, Taichi grasped his chin and lifted his face. It seemed that he was about to kiss Tomoe, who had run out of escape routes.

"You don't know me at all. When I'm like this, lies and games are easy. If you don't like it, keep me out of the moonlight."

"It may be too late for that. Your dangerous side is just too compelling."

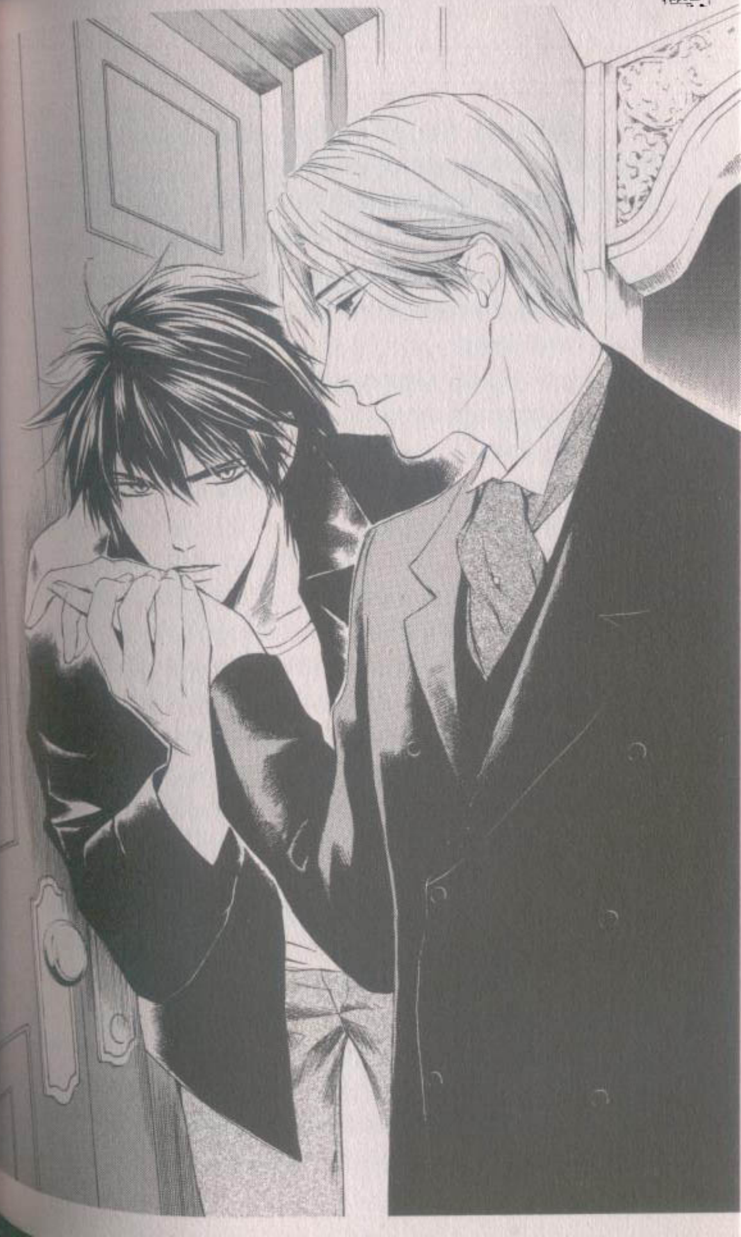
Taichi brought his face even closer to Tomoe's and said confidently, "If you're so in love with me, then do as I say. Tomoe, promise that you won't keep secrets from me. If you promise, I'll give you more of what I gave you last night."

"I...have no secrets."

"I think you do."

"Maybe I do...If you make love to me again, I'll tell you." Tomoe touched Taichi's cheek and tried to draw him closer. Suddenly, the door was jerked open from the inside, and the pair, still locked in an embrace, looked up, startled.

"I'm terribly sorry to interrupt you, but I was worried that your voices would carry to the neighbors. Please, come in and continue with what you were doing." The butler held the door open wide and invited them in.



"I'm sorry, Anthony."

"Not at all, sir." As Anthony closed and locked the door, the two kissed passionately.

Tomoe shrugged off his coat, all the while devouring Taichi's lips. The coat pooled on the floor like a black shadow, and the butler, with no expression, bent down to pick it up. He stood by patiently, waiting for the two to break apart.

They finally separated. Tomoe felt completely drained of strength after just one kiss. His knees buckled and he began to collapse. Taichi easily shouldered Tomoe's weight and turned to the butler.

"Gramps?"

"Excuse me, sir; my name is Anthony Sterns. Please address me as Anthony." The butler stood even straighter with an air of offended dignity.

"Sorry. Well, then, Anthony, take off Tomoe's shoes."

Obediently, the butler removed Tomoe's shoes.

"Yamagami-sama, the suit Tomoe-sama is wearing was made by the finest tailor in London. The shirt is silk and the buttons are made from rare shellfish. I beg you, when you remove them, please do so carefully."

"Last night was my first time, and I completely lost control. Tonight, I don't think I will be so brutal. Don't worry." Taichi laughed dismissively and went up the stairs, Tomoe still draped over his shoulder.

The butler called out to Taichi's retreating back, "Yamagami-sama, Tomoe-sama's bedroom is further down the hall than the guest room. I'll bring up something to drink."

"Okay."

During this conversation, Tomoe remained a dead weight on Taichi's shoulder. Was it really just the kiss that had drained him so? The truth was that he had run completely out of steam.

"I feel like I'm floating," Tomoe spoke softly, and his eyes remained closed as he was carried up the stairs. He didn't usually lose energy this suddenly. Maybe last night had been too violent, after all. He had meant to carry on as usual, but perhaps it was going to be a problem being with someone who never seemed to tire.

But maybe it was just that Tomoe was in love for the first time in so long, and that had drained him emotionally.

"It's strange—there are two different Taichis, and I seem to be falling for both of them."

"Well, if there are two of us, you'd better not betray either one. I've never gotten involved with anyone before, because I didn't think there was anyone who would survive it. You're very precious to me now."

"Then stop saying that you're going to go home."

"This morning, I fully intended to go home, but I've changed my mind. Somehow, I can't stop thinking about you."

Taichi kicked the door open. Unlike the simple guest room, the master bedroom looked like a something out of an old European castle. The focus of the room was the classical queen-sized canopy bed. The only other piece of furniture in the room was a small writing desk. There was a walk-in closet, so there wasn't even a dresser in the room. But the most arresting feature was that, aside from a small vent, there were no windows in the room. And even the shutter over that small vent was firmly shut.

"Tomoe. If you told me that you were a vampire, it wouldn't surprise me at all," Taichi said as he put Tomoe down on the bed.

"What?"

"I looked through your books this afternoon. There were too many books on strange legends and vampires mixed in with the philosophy and economics texts. It's either that, or you have a fetish about becoming a vampire."

Surprised, Tomoe tried to stand up, but he didn't have the energy to do so. If things continued this way, he'd have to spend the night sleeping instead of moving about freely, as usual. "Where's Anthony?"

"Who knows?" Taichi began removing Tomoe's clothes—carefully this time. In the gloom of the dimly lit room, the suit looked like the color of dried blood.

"If I'm not careful with your clothes, Gramps is going to get mad at me," Taichi explained. His large fingers eased the delicate buttons open, one by one.

"Taichi—if I were a vampire, would you still be able to make love to me?"

"You've read all those books—why don't you tell me what I can do? What the hell kind of creature am I?"

"I don't know. I guess everyone wonders that about themselves sometimes. I've read many philosophy books, but I have no answers. Every person is different."

"I'm not asking that deep a question. Think about it more simply. In all of your experience, have you ever heard of another man like me?"

As Tomoe's chest was exposed, Taichi began licking it. Tomoe's nipples, like coral rings against his lily-white skin, hardened; noticing this, Taichi began lavishing attention on them. "You smell really good."

"There's a rose-scented lotion in the bathroom—use it for lubrication."

Taichi looked toward the bathroom but stayed where he was and began to remove his own clothing.

"Taichi—in the bathroom."

"I don't take orders. And I don't need anything like that. My tongue will do the job."

Tonight, Tomoe didn't have the energy to resist. He helped Taichi remove the rest of his clothes and then let out a sigh as he gazed at the strong, naked body revealed to him. "It would be nice if a little of the gentleness from this afternoon remained."

"That Taichi would probably be too timid to even think of making love to you. I can only do it when moonlight shines down." Taichi went to the vent and slid open the shutter. The square vent framed a surreal-looking moon, like something René Magritte might have drawn. "The moon is growing thin, and soon my heart will grow small too. Soon I will be quiet all day long. When I'm like that, will you still want me around?"

"You're misunderstanding me—I don't want you here just for sex. I also just want to spend quiet nights with someone. People who love the sun...I usually just can't get along with them." Tomoe's eyelids drooped.

Taichi, unconcerned, finished undressing and then once again began licking Tomoe's body.

"Where's...Anthony?" Perhaps the butler was in a bad mood tonight—he still hadn't brought Tomoe's special drink.

"Tomoe. You must be hungry. You haven't eaten anything since you woke up. If you really are a vampire, why don't you feed on me?" As if inviting Tomoe to bite him, he presented his neck.

Tomoe reached out and touched it gently. He could clearly feel the hot energy pulsing beneath the skin.

"You are so full of vitality." He could feel Taichi's heart beating—*thud, thud.*

"Do it! Show me your fangs."

Tomoe opened his eyes and laughed weakly. His beautiful white teeth were clearly visible. There were no fangs, and no sign of blood.

"That's too bad—so you're just an eccentric, then." Taichi seemed rather disappointed, but Tomoe didn't even have the strength to explain. If he were to try to make Taichi understand exactly what he was, it would take a long time. And this wasn't really the time and the place for it.

"I love you," Tomoe whispered, still caressing Taichi's carotid artery. He had no strength left, and his words contained none of the power he had used before. "I want you to stay with me a little while longer. Seeing you leave after one day is just as painful as if you leave me after years together...so please, stay by my side as long as you can."

Tomoe's eyes closed, and he gave himself over completely to Taichi. He could no longer find the energy to respond to even the rough caresses of Taichi's tongue. He was as lifeless as a doll.

Taichi shook him roughly. "Hey, wake up! It's not even morning yet!" Taichi slapped Tomoe lightly, but there was no response. "I have no interest in making love to a doll. Hey, Gramps! Tomoe is sleeping!"

As if waiting for a call, the butler finally appeared, carrying a silver tray.

"Gramps, is he really sick?"

"He's not ill. Tomoe-sama is unique and requires special nourishment, that's all. Would you please lift him up?" The butler seemed calm, and so Taichi was slightly reassured.

"Lift him...how do you mean?" Taichi cradled Tomoe on his lap. He was not as light a burden as Taichi had expected, and while the viscount's unresponsiveness doubled his dead weight, Taichi supported him easily.

"Turn his face this way."

Taichi pushed lightly on Tomoe's cheek, forcing his lips slightly apart, and the butler brought the dark red drink close to Tomoe's mouth.

"Tomoe-sama, here you are." As Anthony dribbled a few drops into Tomoe's waiting mouth, he began to drink on his own. As he gulped the liquid down, a few drops escaped. "Tomoe-sama, if you don't start taking nourishment three times a day..."

At the butler's whispered words, Tomoe nodded slightly, and he continued to drink silently. A slight rosiness came back into his cheeks.

"Uhnn." As he continued to drink, his hips began to move suggestively. "Oh..." His left hand clung to Taichi, while his other hand took the glass and drained it in one gulp. "Anthony, what were you doing? Were you trying to punish me by bringing my drink late?" Tomoe's beautiful eyes opened wide as he complained to the butler.

"Of course not, sir. Because I didn't know when you would be arriving home, it was not ready, and it took some time to prepare. Beginning tomorrow, you must drink three times a day."

"Ah...aaah." Tomoe was no longer listening to the butler. He had already closed his legs around Taichi's body and had begun moving against him violently. He dropped the glass he was holding, and the butler, moving with remarkable speed, caught it before it hit the floor.

With a faint smile, he excused himself and silently left the room.

"You're very strange, but he's just as weird, isn't he?" Taichi mused.

"Nnn...ah...ah...aaah!"

Taichi captured Tomoe's suddenly red lips with his own, feeling the heat that now coursed through the viscount's body. Tomoe, fully aroused, thrust his tongue into Taichi's mouth as if trying to devour him.

"Nnn...ah...ah!" As their lips separated, Tomoe moaned in ecstasy.

Taichi roughly pulled Tomoe up and said, "You taste of blood."

"Nnn...that's good, Taichi...aaah!"

"You were as limp as a doll just a minute ago, and now you're hot to your core. It's really odd." Taichi

grasped Tomoe's hard cock. The tip was already moist, but Taichi remembered from the night before that even though Tomoe came repeatedly, he did not release as much seed as Taichi did, and it wasn't milky white, but a small amount of clear, transparent fluid. It took a long time for Tomoe to come, as well.

"Even though we did it so much yesterday, you look like a virgin today," Taichi murmured. Tonight, it seemed that Taichi was the calm one. Yesterday had been his first time, and he had attacked Tomoe like a wild beast, but he had learned a lot, and his body remembered what to do.

Tomoe's body was welcoming. He accepted Taichi in any position, and Taichi enjoyed touching his soft, supple skin. He had very little body hair. But he wasn't built like a woman—his frame was sturdy and developed. His muscled legs, rejuvenated by just one glass of his special drink, twined around Taichi's body as Taichi plunged into him.

Tomoe covered Taichi's face with kisses and panted feverishly, "Taichi...aaah...If you're going to stay for awhile, could you tell me you like me? Just once a day will be enough."

"Just once a day?"

"As many times as you like...please say it. I don't ask for love...just say that you like me." Tomoe was almost begging. "Taichi, don't leave me. If you stay here, you won't have to worry about anything." Tomoe held Taichi tightly with his newfound strength.

Taichi grabbed Tomoe by the hips and thrust into him violently.

"Ah...ah...ah!" Tomoe was not shy about voicing his pleasure, and he shouted loudly. Taichi came inside Tomoe but remained hard; he stayed inside his lover as he pushed Tomoe down on his back and started thrusting into him again.

"Don't worry—I want to stay with you too." He spread Tomoe's legs wide and watched his cock pumping in and out of Tomoe's tight hole. His rhythm increased. "I could get addicted to this. This is probably what my grandmother was worried about. Once is not enough. We could do it over and over, and I'd still want more."

"Nnn...Aaah!"

"You're mine. We'll do it as often as you want. This should satisfy even you."

In reply, Tomoe grasped Taichi's arms, and his fingernails bit deeply into the young man's skin.

Even when Tomoe went to sleep with someone else, he usually spent the day alone. When he opened his eyes, his butler was gazing down at him, carrying a tray with a glass on it. How many decades had Tomoe woken up in precisely the same way?

"Anthony, do you remember?" As Tomoe took the glass, he spoke to the butler with greater intimacy than usual.

"Remember what, sir?"

"What it feels like when you come so violently... You're a man—you must have had that experience."

"I suppose so, but it was many years ago, and I barely remember it."

"It was very intense."

When the butler heard this, he glanced at the sheets. "I wonder if that gentleman might be something special."

"There's no doubt that he's something special. The first night was amazing, but last night was wonderful too. I wonder if he's always like that when the moon is in the sky?" Tomoe showed the butler the bite marks Taichi had left. "He doesn't know what he is. He changes when the moon is up, so he could be a werewolf. What do you think?"

"I've heard of werewolves in Eastern Europe, but this is Japan. I'm afraid I don't really know anything about it."

"Well, here in Japan, there are the legends of the *Inugami,* or dog gods. Or maybe he is descended from werewolves. It's odd. We would be evolved...no, devolved...from vampires and werewolves."

"Do you really believe we have devolved? I would say evolved, myself."

"Vampires without fangs and a werewolf who doesn't become a wolf. Is that progress?"

"I would say it indicates a remarkable adaptation to living in the city," the butler replied. He didn't have fangs, either, but for an elderly man, he had an exceptional set of natural teeth.

"No, I think it is degeneration. I can't reproduce, and I can't make others into vampires."

Tomoe smoothed a hand over his hair. A fine strand was wrapped around one finger. His hair did not grow, and neither did his nails. He excreted very little. But he was definitely alive. The proof was in the joy he felt when Taichi made love to him.

"It is progress. If we ever go to the stars, our kind will be ideally suited for the voyage. We live many times longer than humans and require little sustenance." The butler said these words with an absolutely serious expression on his face.

Tomoe, who was heading for the bathroom, laughed out loud. "You're right. You're absolutely right. That's splendid, Anthony—we are suited for long-term space travel."

The butler's words had lightened Tomoe's mood. Even if he had been joking, it was still an interesting idea. It was really funny, when he thought about it. When the first interstellar spaceship was ready to go, he and his kind would gird their loins and come out to the rest of the world.

In good spirits, he put on a heavy sweater and a pair of wool trousers before heading downstairs. In the living room, a stranger was sitting on the sofa, facing away from him. When Tomoe looked closer, however, he saw that it was Taichi, with newly cut hair. His chiseled face, previously concealed by his long hair, was fully exposed. His eyes, framed in his fierce face, sparkled with intelligence, which made him more appealing than ever. He was wearing a plain heavy shirt and new trousers—probably chosen by the butler. He looked like any other young man born and raised in the city.

"Anthony nagged you, I guess. He does like

beautiful things." Tomoe moved around to the front of the sofa and suddenly sat on Taichi's lap. He put his arms around Taichi and hugged him.

Taichi, without the moon's influence, again blushed to the tips of his ears and looked down at the floor.

Tomoe lifted his face and kissed him. "I like you with short hair, too. And I like you when you are quiet. No matter what you do or how you act, I think it's wonderful."

"Tomoe-san, you move so fast..."

"You promised, remember? You promised to say it."

"Tomoe-san, I like you." Taichi turned even redder.

Tomoe shook his head slightly. "Look, Taichi, you have to stop being so polite to me. If we don't treat each other as equals, it will be a problem. It feels like you're being unfaithful to me."

"So I shouldn't say 'yes,' for example—'yeah' would be better?"

"Yes, and Tomoe is my last name. You should call me Akihiro."

"Akihiro...I'm sorry, Tomoe-sa—I mean, er..."

"It's okay; you don't have to remember immediately. By the way, you were right. I am a vampire—well, a failure of a vampire, anyway." Immediately after this confession, Tomoe stood up and looked at Taichi. After finally revealing the secret he had promised to tell, he was remarkably calm. "Anthony, we won't be going out tonight. Please make Taichi an early supper, but before that, I'd like some tea."

After giving these orders to the butler, Tomoe went into the library and returned carrying an old album. He placed it on the coffee table and again gazed at Taichi.

Taichi didn't tremble in fear; he didn't even look very surprised. He just returned Tomoe's gaze.

"The picture hanging in the dining room is a portrait of my parents. My mother, Viscount Tomoe's daughter, met my father at a party at one of the foreign diplomats' homes, and they fell in love and married over the objections of her parents. After they went to England, I was born."

Tomoe showed Taichi a photo from the album. In the sepia-toned picture, a mustachioed and bearded officer was standing behind a seated woman wearing a long dress. She lovingly cradled a baby on her lap.

Tomoe pulled out a second photo. "This is the last picture of me as a human." This one showed a young man who looked just like Tomoe. He was wearing a uniform and looked the perfect young aristocrat. It was impossible to tell that Japanese blood ran in his veins. The scene was as perfect as a picture postcard.

"This was taken on my twenty-eighth birthday. At that time, my lover was a commissioned officer serving under my father. I met him when I was seventeen. He was three years older than me, and we had been together for ten years."

"Do you have a photo of him?" Taichi looked uncomfortable. That alone improved Tomoe's mood.

"How can you possibly be jealous of someone who's long in his grave?"

Tomoe closed his eyes as he remembered. Even though it had happened ninety-two years ago, Tomoe would never forget that day. It was the last time he had ever seen anything illuminated by the sun.

"It was all my fault. I betrayed him with a trifling fellow on a momentary whim. I was everything to him."

A bullet from his lover's pistol had pierced Tomoe's belly. They were far from London, in a deserted field by a small village. The field was covered with small flowers, the name of which Tomoe didn't know. The wind had swept over the carpet of yellow flowers, and the sun had slowly moved across the sky as Tomoe lay there looking up. He should have died quietly. If a young boy from a nearby mansion had not been playing with his master's dog in that field, it all would have ended for Tomoe then and there. The dog, smelling blood, ran toward Tomoe in excitement. The young boy, finding a beautiful young man lying in the field with his midsection soaked in blood, immediately ran back to the mansion.

"It's not true that vampires can't see their reflection in a mirror. And not just mirrors. Our photos can be taken too."

In the next photo, Tomoe was standing next to a very cold-looking woman.

"This is the woman who saved my life. I dare not tell you her name. She had been a vampire for a long time and was a pureblood."

The woman had looked down at Tomoe, who had been carried to her home by her servants, and sighed.

"It's so sad," she had said. "He looks like Adonis reborn." Tomoe remembered that he hadn't even felt pain at that point, as his breath became weaker and weaker. His legs felt cold, and he had lost most of the blood in his body.

The woman leaned down and whispered into Tomoe's ear. "I can give you new life, but I can't promise that you will end up like me. It may turn out to be a gift you will only be able to enjoy for a short time." She did not promise him eternal life, because some of his kind had died shortly after being changed.

Tomoe thought it was still a good bargain. If he were granted new life, he supposed it would be sad when he died a second time, but at least he could see his parents again and reassure them.

Tomoe looked at Taichi. "I've never told this tale to anyone before, but I needed to tell you. You're different too, so I thought you would be able to understand."

Taichi was still in a quiet phase, and all he did was nod silently.

"But I was unable to return to my parents right away. Madame protected me at her mansion for twenty years. She was like a second mother to me."

At one of the secret parties held once every ten years, Tomoe was introduced to others of her kind. To them, he must have seemed somewhat different himself. He could only consume the blood of women, he had no fangs, and he refused to attack humans. If Madame hadn't been able to purchase fresh blood in the large city near her home, Tomoe's life as a vampire would have been short indeed.

"When I finally went home, years later, I told my parents I was my own illegitimate son, born to a prostitute. As proof, I showed them the watch my father had given me, and they accepted me unconditionally as their grandson."

He showed Taichi another photo of his parents, but they were now old. Only Tomoe looked exactly the same. It was only natural that they believed he was their grandchild.

"At some point, they realized that I was not a normal human. Even so, they protected me. I've never forgotten them. I can't put into words how happy I was on those nights when we sat together in front of the hearth." A tear trickled down Tomoe's cheek. No matter how much time passed, he could never think of his parents without crying.

"Even though it meant they would spend years as old people, I told them that Madame could give them longer lives. I just wanted to have more time with them. But they chose the path ordained by God, leaving me alone." Tomoe covered his face with his hands. He didn't want Taichi to see his tears. His father had taught him always to cry alone in his bedroom, with his face buried in a pillow. Although Tomoe had been taught that a man did not show his tears to others, he was not always successful at concealing them.

Suddenly, he realized that Taichi was gently embracing him. This gentle Taichi had no objections to providing Tomoe with a shoulder to cry on. His broad chest and sturdy arms gave Tomoe the sense of security and warmth that he had missed.

"I'm here now—you don't have to be sad anymore. If you'll have me, I'll protect you forever. So you don't have any more reasons to cry."

"Thank you. You are the one I have been waiting for. I've suffered for a long time because I betrayed my love, but maybe God is ready to forgive me now." Tomoe put his arms around Taichi and breathed his beloved's scent in deeply.

"You're very kind, Taichi. I vow never to make a mistake like that again. If you'll stay with me, I'll want for nothing else in the world." The two continued to embrace for a while. Tomoe felt peace of mind; this man alone did not see him as a monster.

"You're lucky in a way, Akihiro. At least you know exactly what you are. I know nothing about myself. My grandmother took that secret to the grave."

"We'll find out together." Tomoe gestured toward the library.

"I wonder if we'll be able to learn anything?"

"If we can find even one piece of the puzzle, that's better than nothing, right? If you protect me, I'll protect you. If there's anything I can do to help you, I will certainly do it. Luckily, I have nothing but time."

At that moment, the butler appeared. There was tea in a large teapot, and warm milk in a small pitcher. The teacups were decorated with a beautiful rose pattern.

"It has been a while since you enjoyed a proper tea, hasn't it?" For some reason, the butler seemed more lively than usual. A three-tiered silver tray contained sandwiches, scones, jam, and clotted cream.

"May I ask you something?" Taichi faced the butler.

"How may I help you?" The butler turned his head slightly in Taichi's direction while he poured a beautiful amber tea into two cups.

"How long have you been with Akihiro? You don't seem to sleep as much as he does, but are you one of his kind?"

"Please don't concern yourself with me. I am just a butler. That's all you need to know." The butler took the lid off of the sugar jar as he spoke to Taichi. "I preserve the customs that have been in this family for many years, such as taking tea at five in the afternoon."

"It seems that Anthony believes you need instruction in the gentlemanly arts. Taichi, these customs have very little to do with modern life, but if you don't listen to him, he will be very offended."

As both Tomoe and the butler looked at him, Taichi grew flustered and straightened up. "What am I supposed to do? Do I have to do something besides just drink the tea?"

"That is correct. First, you must remember the correct way to drink tea. If you are determined to live with Tomoe-sama, you must learn some manners."

At these words, Taichi suddenly understood. Under the light of the moon, he knew no manners. He had called the stately butler "Gramps" and this had injured his pride, so these lessons were his way of indirectly protesting.

"I think you also need to understand, Anthony, that when the moon is out, my personality changes, and more than that, something wild wakes in me. I become dangerous," Taichi explained earnestly to the butler.

Taichi was anxious to restore the servant to his former good mood. "I'm very grateful that I met Akihiro so soon after coming to the city. If he hadn't helped me, no doubt I would already have been arrested by the police."

The butler closed his eyes and nodded. "We must avoid the police at all costs."

Manners were necessary for those who were different—at least if they wanted to live for a long time. Times had changed. A network of information tied the world together, and for those trying to hide their pasts, it was vital that they avoid being noticed by the police and the press. If imprisoned, they would not be able to drink juice with human blood in it. Tomoe would collapse within a day.

Witch hunts and vampire hunters were no more. They had been replaced by members of the media, armed with cameras. The vampires' enemies no longer consisted of just villagers and priests—now they had to consider anyone with curiosity a foe. Nosy people were their greatest fear. It wasn't just Tomoe's problem. All of his kind had to avoid doing anything wrong that would attract attention.

Tomoe caught Taichi's gaze and demonstrated how to pour a little milk into the tea and then hold the saucer gracefully with the left hand. He then showed Taichi how to drink slowly, holding the cup with his right hand. Taichi tried to imitate his actions but was stymied by what to do about the sugar.

Tomoe laughed and said, "At the most, put two spoonfuls into your cup. If you use too much, you won't be able to taste the tea's true flavor." He put sugar into his own tea. Taichi copied his actions and drank his tea.

Relaxed by the familiar ritual, Tomoe said, "Taichi, this is just speculation, but...there are legends around the world that tell of men who turn into wolves when the moon is full, so it wouldn't be odd if there were something similar in Japan. There are also legends about Inugami here."

"Wolves?"

"Does that bring anything to mind?"

"Nothing. My grandmother might have known something, but if she did, she didn't tell me. If they're called Inugami, people must have known about them for a long time." Taichi looked lost in thought, as though he were remembering something.

Tomoe tried to set Taichi's mind at ease. "Even the emotions of normal people can be affected by the moon. The tides are affected by the phases of the moon, and so are the rhythms of the body. Maybe it's just something like that."

"Come to think of it, my grandmother was strange too. She knew a lot about the mountain, and even though she was very old, she had no fear of wild animals when she went deep into the forests. I think the villagers thought she was special."

"Don't you know where your parents are?"

"I never knew my parents—my grandmother raised me. I thought we were normal, until my grandmother died. Then I met the villagers more often, and I finally realized that there was something strange about me."

"So your secret is buried with her." Tomoe thought that was cruel. This woman, who had only told Taichi that he was different and must live alone on the mountain, was dead. Had she never thought that Taichi might need someone who would understand him? Tomoe himself could not bear to live alone. Even if he knew that they must soon part, he needed the warmth others could provide. Such warmth was fleeting—when the time came for the other to leave, Tomoe was always left behind, until, defeated by loneliness, he searched out a new companion.

He thought that the ability to survive in isolation was a sign of great strength. Both mentally and physically, he thought that Taichi was far stronger than he. "Let's research this together. Surely two heads are better than one?" Tomoe was indirectly trying to make a case for himself. "I've told you my secret. I'd love to have your help. You don't have to try so hard to hide your true self here."

"Umm...Maybe you're right."

A place where he could just be himself—Tomoe knew just how wonderful that could be. Just as Madame had helped him, he would help Taichi.

On nights when the moon didn't show her face, Taichi was just a quiet, well-behaved young man. In the light of day, even if the moon was visible, Taichi was unaffected. Only moonlight had the power to change him. When not under the moon's power, Taichi led a simple life. When Taichi went to bed, he held Tomoe

close, but never attempted to have sex. Tomoe wasn't sure if Taichi's calmer self was reserved, or if his wilder self drained his energy so much that he couldn't have sex, but Tomoe was left feeling unsatisfied. He waited eagerly for the wild Taichi to reappear, even though he felt somewhat guilty about that.

Taichi was extremely calm save for a burning desire to learn. He read books constantly, and under Tomoe's tutelage, learned to use the computer. He amassed a great deal of information in a short time.

During the day, he helped the butler around the house; at night, he kept Tomoe company. But compared to his life on the mountain, this still left him with a lot of energy, and he sometimes ran to distant libraries in search of more information.

These peaceful days passed one after another. Everything seemed to be going well. Just as Tomoe began to relax, he received a phone call from Minamikawa, the manager of his boys' pub. It was nine at night, so the pub was just opening.

"There's a customer here who says he wants to see you."

"Me?"

Tomoe had not gone to the pub for many days. He'd been expecting some kind of trouble when Minamikawa called, but he was surprised that it was about a customer.

"He says he's Professor Ohata from Kanagawa Cultural University."

"Professor Ohata—I don't know anyone by that name." Tomoe realized that he was still dressed casually.

He began looking through his closet for a suit to wear to the pub.

"He's waiting for you here now. Should I have him meet you somewhere else?"

"Hmmm. That's not a bad idea. What kind of person is he?"

"He looks like he's in his forties and seems a bit odd," Minamikawa said frankly. He was never lavish in his praise.

"Have him meet me at Café Amyl. Tell him I'll be there in ten...no, make that twenty minutes." After hanging up, Tomoe changed quickly.

"Work?" Taichi asked somewhat forlornly as he watched Tomoe change.

"Yes—did you think I was going off to cheat on you?" Tomoe asked this jokingly, but Taichi's expression remained serious. "What? I'm just joking. There's no way I'm going to be unfaithful to you."

"Maybe—but I'm not doing anything with you now." Taichi embraced Tomoe's half-naked figure from behind. "You really want to do it every day, don't you?"

As Taichi gently stroked Tomoe's chest, Tomoe remembered the last time Taichi had made love to him. Their first time had lasted all night, but as time went on, their lovemaking sessions seemed to grow shorter and shorter. The last time had taken just one hour. Since then, Taichi had not approached Tomoe at all.

"It's okay, Taichi. You hold me every night, don't you? That's enough for me." Tomoe kissed Taichi gently, consoling his lover.

"I've told you over and over that I don't just want sex. Your intellectual side is very charming too."

"Akihiro, I do want to make love to you. But I'm afraid that my violent side will emerge again and hurt you, and I just can't." Taichi held Tomoe lovingly and kissed him back. The fervor of his kiss showed Tomoe that Taichi did want him.

"When I was in the mountains and I became violent, I would knock down trees or kill boars with my bare hands, and that would provide release. But the things I'm learning now, my wild side will also know. What if my wild side becomes clever as well?" Taichi asked dejectedly.

Tomoe reached up to touch the young man's cheek. As he did, a strand of Taichi's hair fell over his finger. He had cut it just a little while ago, but it had already grown so much. Unlike Tomoe, Taichi's body was constantly renewing itself.

"When my grandmother was still alive, she would bind me with chains before I turned violent. She was truly afraid that I would go to the village and attack women. But now, even when I become wild, you are there to believe in me." As Taichi hugged Tomoe, his voice became more and more anxious. "That's why I worry so. No matter how much lust you feel, please don't betray me. Even if my wild side can do it only half of the month, please only do it with him."

"I'm not going to betray you. I've told you that over and over. I promise."

"You'd better keep that promise. Wolves mate for life, according to the books. I apparently have wolf's blood in me, and you are the only one for me. It's the same for him; and since he can't appear right now, he must be very irritated."

"Taichi. It's just work. Even I have to earn a living. Especially to pay for my special drink."

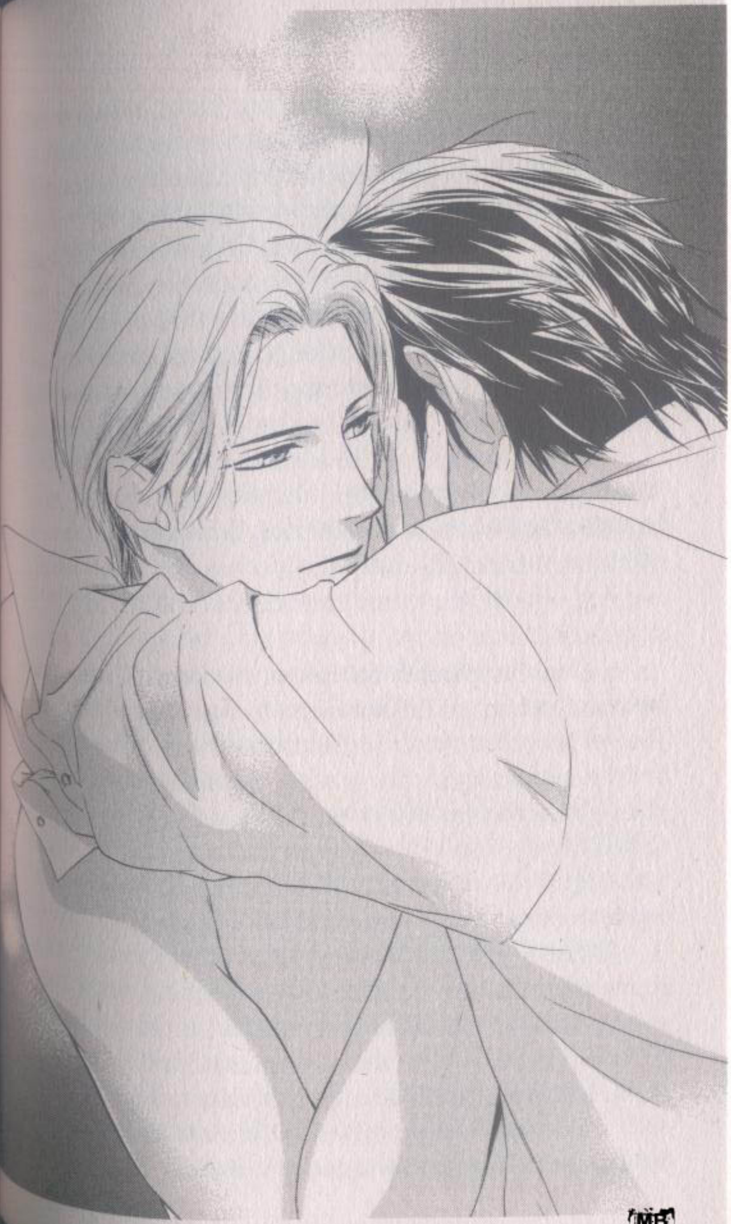
The woman who had saved Tomoe owned a large fruit orchard on an island in southern waters. Many healthy young men and women worked there. They were paid extraordinarily high wages and were fed abundantly every day, but once a week they were required to donate small amounts of blood. For the sake of other vampires around the world, Madame functioned as a kind of beekeeper, tending hives full of people willing to give up some of their blood.

"Madame's special juice is very expensive. It's all-natural, with no additives. Without it, I couldn't survive." Tomoe did not want to spend the entire inheritance left to him by his parents on having his drink frozen and shipped to him, so he continued to work. Really, if you weren't rich, it was very difficult to survive as a vampire in this day and age.

"I understand. For your sake, I want to get a job too."

"That's not necessary. You don't have to worry about it. I love watching you eat with such enjoyment. It makes me happy that you can enjoy so much that I have lost." Tomoe hugged Taichi again, and after kissing him, resumed changing his clothes.

As he walked toward the appointed location, Tomoe thought it was the first time in a while that he had been alone. He realized anew just how lucky he was. He had no idea how many more years he would live.



Tomoe no longer believed that just living a long time was the source of happiness, but neither had he reached the point of wishing for death. He thought that he would like to stay with Taichi until he died. Even if Taichi grew old and lost his good looks, Tomoe wouldn't fall out of love with him. Tomoe had never had a lover who lasted for more than ten years. Before they could guess his secret, he had always broken things off himself. But Taichi already knew everything. There were no secrets to keep them apart.

Tomoe walked up the steps to the late-night café. Although it was already ten o'clock, the café was still crowded, and when Tomoe entered, he became the focus of many glances. His dark blue suit was the color of the evening sky. It was complemented by a silver tie that suggested the moon.

Those in the café were clearly wondering who this beautiful man could be there to meet. Ignoring the stares, Tomoe looked around. He had no idea who Ohata was, but the middle-aged man reading a book seemed like a good guess. Behind silver-rimmed glasses, there was a somewhat sly look to his eyes. Although he couldn't have been waiting long, there were already many cigarette butts in the ashtray in front of him.

"Are you Professor Ohata?" Tomoe had approached the man soundlessly from behind, and at his words, the man raised his face with a start and dropped his book. It was a thick hard-cover anthropology book.

"Ah, yes, I'm Ohata. Are you Tomoe-san?"

"Yes." Tomoe sensed an unpleasant feeling from Ohata. Since being reborn as a vampire, Tomoe had found that he could easily read other people's feelings. He had first been attracted to Taichi by the young man's purity. He was able to leave management of the pub to Minamikawa for the same reason—his desires were healthy ones. But this man was full of ill-will.

Tomoe wished to return home, but seeing no other options, he sat down at the table.

"A boys' pub. You're not just the owner of a place like that. You were what, an actor? A model? A host at one of the clubs in Roppongi?" Ohata addressed Tomoe with vulgar curiosity.

Tomoe narrowed his eyes against the lingering cigarette smoke, and indirectly protesting the stranger's intrusive questions, he waited for the waiter to come. "Have we met before? I don't believe we have."

"Sorry, here's my business card."

On the proffered card was written:

Kanagawa Cultural University
Professor of Folklore
Einosuke Ohata

"Folklore? This is unrelated to my field of business." Tomoe ordered a cup of tea as he took off his coat and folded it over his lap. He continued to observe Ohata.

"As it pertains to news of Taichi Yamagami, I believe it may concern you."

"Taichi Yamagami." Tomoe secretly felt a bit worried. This man was a folklorist. He had at first thought Ohata wanted to learn something about Tomoe himself. Madame had warned him constantly that among men, there were many with odd interests. In their studies, they sometimes sniffed out the presence of those who were different, like Tomoe. To avoid being noticed, it was imperative never to go to the police, to pay all taxes and perform all duties required of normal citizens, and to live a blameless life. Tomoe had entered false information in his own family register many times, and the slightest slip could spell disaster.

"Taichi Yamagami...What connection do you think I have with him?"

"I asked at Kakei Dojo. Kakei said that Yamagami, who was supposed to come work for him, had instead gone off with some man named Tomoe. I've been asking around since then, but didn't find out anything until tonight."

"Ah, that man. I had thought to hire him to work at my own pub, but he was just too rustic and I fired him," Tomoe immediately lied.

Ohata smiled knowingly and asked him innocently, "Your full name is Akihiro Sanders Tomoe, is it not?"

"That's right; what of it?"

"You live in a very nice house. The descendant of a viscount."

Tomoe raised the cup of tea to his lips. It wasn't bad, he thought, but Anthony's was much better.

"It seems that a large young man has moved into your residence recently."

"Your point?"

"It's Taichi Yamagami, isn't it?" Ohata smiled in supposed victory.

Tomoe considered things calmly. First, he had to ascertain the situation. Why was Ohata searching for Taichi Yamagami?

"I'm thinking of employing him for myself, you see." Ohata picked up his pack of cigarettes and put another Seven Stars between his sneering lips.

Tomoe averted his face in an attempt to avoid as much of the smoke as possible, and waited for Ohata to continue.

"As a folklorist, I have to go into the mountains a lot—he would be an excellent assistant. I had intended to speak with Sanjo, the village elder, but we just missed each other."

That was a lie. This man was good at lies. Tomoe gazed at him steadily and silently said *You are lying. Do you honestly believe you can lie to me? I would like you to stop lying now and tell me what you are really after.*

Under Tomoe's steady gaze, Ohata lost some of his composure. "Tomoe-san, are you familiar with the Sanka?" The professor suddenly changed the subject. For some reason he seemed to be finding it difficult to continue to lie.

"I'm afraid I'm not as learned as you are."

"They're a people who roamed the mountains of Japan. They didn't settle anywhere, but moved from place to place, wherever they could scratch out an existence. I guess they would be called gypsies today."

"So?"

"Taichi Yamagami's grandmother was a Sanka. I don't know why, but she left her tribe, borrowed a piece of land from Sanjo, and set up in the house that is now deep in the waters behind the dam."

It was surprising that Ohata knew more about the

Yamagami family than Taichi did. Tomoe sensed that he wasn't lying this time. Ohata seemed to have done a lot of research on the subject.

"I don't plan to give you a lecture on folklore. Explaining the Sanka would take all day. I went through a lot while I was researching them, though, and I discovered one unexpected truth." Ohata spoke enthusiastically about the trials he had undergone researching the Sanka. Tomoe thought it was a blessing that the man had abandoned lying, but this rambling was wearying.

"In those days, the Sanka were very low caste. And yet they took the name Yamagami, or 'mountain gods'. They were descendants of the Inugami."

That's done it, thought Tomoe. Ancient Japanese legends spoke of wolf-men—also known as Inugami. This much Tomoe had learned from the books in his home library. Legends of werewolves, such as those from Eastern Europe, did not exist in Japan, but there were many stories of Inugami. Such legends weren't as well known as those about possession by spirits, but Inugami legends survived in many regions.

The problem, though, was how Ohata knew about Taichi, and whether he had connected him to the Inugami.

"Yamagami-kun is just a normal young man. The truth is that in my home I had only employed an elderly butler, so I hired him as a bodyguard, because it's a dangerous area." Tomoe's tone was bored, as though he had no interest in the subject. "You say you study folklore. This belief in Inugami, which century does it come from? You're not suggesting that this is a modern problem?" Tomoe spoke as if mocking Ohata.

Ohata instantly took umbrage. "You say that because you know nothing! Even when Yamagami was wounded badly, he healed within two days. When he rescued one of the villagers from a bear, he was apparently torn up badly by the creature's claws, but when the villager he rescued visited him two days later, he was outside chopping wood as though nothing had happened."

"Old people often exaggerate."

At this, Ohata became very annoyed and said, "There is a secret about the bodies of the Inugami. If we could understand that, it would be a boon to modern medicine. Don't you agree?" An expression of greed crossed Ohata's face. He intended to profit by experimenting on Taichi—a pure soul who knew nothing of greed.

"The truth is that Taichi Yamagami's grandmother was also a puzzle. The roving Sanka rarely fill out family registers, so there's no way to know exactly how old she was, but she lived at least one hundred and fifty years."

"One hundred and fifty years."

"A very long-lived family, wouldn't you say? Don't you agree that medical science needs to know about this?"

"A long-lived family?" Tomoe murmured these words absentmindedly. If the long lifespan was true, then maybe it meant he wouldn't be separated from Taichi so soon. Ohata had absolutely no idea how happy his words had made Tomoe.

"The story was that Taichi Yamagami had been found on the mountain by the woman he called grandmother. You didn't know that, did you?"

"No, but that would mean he wasn't one of the Inugami, wouldn't it?"

"No, I believe that she listed him as her adopted son in the family register, but I think that the woman he called grandmother, Tatsu Yamagami, was the woman who gave birth to him. She was actually his mother."

"Ohata-san, are you serious? When Yamagami-kun's grandmother died, she was more than eighty years old."

"Unlike humans, Inugami can give birth at a very advanced age. According to those who saw her when she first came to live in the village, she was very young-looking for her age." Ohata's eyes glittered feverishly.

Tomoe began to worry that this was a very bad situation. If Taichi learned about this man, perhaps he would change his mind and want to go with the professor. Taichi's greatest problem stemmed from not knowing what he was. This man might have the answer. He even knew of Taichi's grandmother—no, mother. He knew much more than Tomoe did about the Inugami and the wandering Sanka.

Tomoe did not want to allow Taichi to meet the professor. If Taichi were fooled and decided to cooperate with Ohata for the sake of understanding the secrets of his past, Tomoe would not have the right to stop him.

"I'm sorry, but this discussion has moved further and further from reality. Whether Taichi-kun is Tatsu Yamagami's adopted son or not is nothing to me. He is

an innocent young man. I plan to teach him and show him how to make a life in the city."

But Ohata was not one to give up easily. He drew closer to Tomoe and whispered evilly, "I want to meet Yamagami-kun face to face. I don't need your permission to do so. I just wanted to explain my reasons to you. He can choose for himself who he wants to work for. He has the right to choose to be with whomever he pleases."

"You're right." Tomoe reached for the check. If he stayed in this man's presence any longer, he would be unable to stop himself from reaching for his carotid artery and telling the man to stop saying such foolish things and to shut himself up in his library.

"Please ask Yamagami-kun to get in touch with me."

"I will tell him about our discussion, but that is all. What he does next is up to him." The choice, after all, was still Taichi's. He was not like Tomoe—although Taichi was different, he was still very nearly human. He could go out under the sun, he could reproduce, and he ate and drank normally. If doctors were able to understand the secrets of his body's healing factor, he would mostly likely be hailed as the savior of mankind.

But Tomoe didn't want to give Taichi up to anybody. He had finally found a lover who could release him from his solitude. He loved others of his kind, such as Anthony and Madame, as part of his family, but the love he felt for Taichi was different. He needed a lover who would be with him until the end of his days. Without loving arms to hold him gently and make love to him fiercely, he would be just drawing out his days, marking time in despair.

Tomoe nodded slightly to Ohata and left the café alone. No matter what happened, he did not want Ohata to meet Taichi. As he walked down the street, he felt eyes upon him, but when he looked around, the feeling disappeared.

"Taichi? No, it's not possible."

Even though it was late, the area in front of the station was crowded. Tomoe decided to make an appearance at the pub and check in with Minamikawa. He didn't generally like to go when customers were present, but tonight, it couldn't be helped.

"I dislike women," he sighed. Tomoe reached the entrance of the building but was unable to go forward. Perhaps he didn't like the smell of makeup or perfume. Or maybe it was the flattery that women always used with the opposite sex. But the really odd thing was that, in spite of his intense dislike of human females, if young women came near, Tomoe was nearly overwhelmed by the desire to feed upon them. And it was not a normal kind of craving. It could have been the remnants of ancient blood that coursed through his body, waking up old memories.

Tomoe wasn't particularly a feminist, but he thought that his feelings toward women were very impolite. He had, after all, been raised under strict rules. He was a blend of the fighting samurai spirit alive in Meiji Japan and the spirit of chivalry that was present in earlier days in England. He had learned from both schools of thought. He had been raised to respect women

and to hold humans as the supreme form of existence. It was proof of his unchanged humanity that Tomoe could not forgive himself for this bizarre desire to both reject and feed on women.

Tomoe called Minamikawa on his cell phone. "Minamikawa-kun, I'm very sorry, but could you meet me outside?"

The loyal employee soon appeared.

"I'm sorry—I hope you weren't with a customer?"

"It's not important—is anything the matter? He *was* a very strange man." Minamikawa was wearing an expensive suit and a heavy-looking bracelet. He rarely spoke ill of others—perhaps he had some sort of weird complex about university professors. In any case, Ohata certainly was the kind of man who would treat a guest who was of no use to him with disdain.

"He was very odd. He is researching the family history of a man I've hired for another job. It is an invasion of this man's privacy. If he asks you anything about me or anyone else, I want you to send him about his business." Tomoe spoke frankly with Minamikawa, and his manager felt his unease abate as the normally friendly atmosphere between them returned.

"I see. He was asking very intrusive questions about you, like whether you liked men—I was getting very angry, and if he had stayed any longer, I was about to lose my temper in front of the customers."

"It seems he doesn't have the courage to ask me such questions himself. He is a coward and beneath contempt."

"That's right! And his clothes! As a professor, he has to make a pretty good salary, but his suit was one of those you buy off the rack—two for two hundred dollars. And it smelled like he never washed them. He was disgusting."

"It sounds like he even caused you unpleasant memories." Tomoe patted Minamikawa on the shoulder. "Thank you. I always feel safe about leaving the pub in your hands because you do such an excellent job and you are a great judge of character. If I do decide to open more pubs, I think I'll appoint you executive manager. I'll also set up an appropriate office for you." Tomoe whispered these words almost like a declaration of love into Minamikawa's ear.

Minamikawa's face lit up with joy. "Thank you! I'll work hard to live up to your expectations of me."

"Hard work is all very good, but be careful not to drink too much with the customers. It's better if just the customers become drunk." Tomoe turned a smile on Minamikawa that was many times more charming than usual, lifted his hand in farewell, and left.

Minamikawa watched as Tomoe disappeared into the distance.

Tomoe was aware of Minamikawa's gaze, but he again felt other eyes on him and looked around.

"The moon is not yet out." For Taichi's sake, Tomoe had learned the phases of the moon. Tomorrow was the new moon. What would happen when that other Taichi finally appeared again? Tomoe was both eager to see him again and also a bit apprehensive.

When Tomoe got home, he searched for information on Ohata. He was actually a professor at Kanagawa Cultural University and had published several books. They had such titles as *Hidden People of the Mountains* and *Unknown History*, and they were not written with the average reader in mind.

Tomoe also began researching the Sanka that Ohata had spoken about but could find very little.

Ohata had no doubt run into Taichi's grandmother, a descendant of these wandering people. But in his research, he had also discovered the tale of a golden wolf, which could prove to be a huge goldmine for a man like him.

Tomoe told Anthony about Ohata and warned him to be on the alert. He instructed his servant that even if Ohata asked to see Taichi, he was to be kept away. Ohata knew where he lived, so they could not afford to let down their guard.

When Tomoe had returned home, Taichi was there. Anthony had said that Taichi had gone out running because the young man felt he was getting out of shape. Taichi was wearing the sportswear that Anthony had readied for him, so Tomoe had no reason to doubt this.

Taichi had returned well before Tomoe, and the moon was not yet out. Besides, no normal person could outrun Tomoe's Jaguar. Tomoe felt ashamed of his mistrust.

Perhaps because he had been left alone, Taichi seemed oddly distant. But Tomoe's thoughts were consumed with Ohata, and he didn't notice anything as they went to bed at dawn.

"Tomoe-sama." When Tomoe woke out of a deep sleep, he saw the butler standing by the bed carrying a glass of juice and a letter. The butler always went through the mail and left it in the library for Tomoe's inspection; if he had brought a letter to the bedroom, it must have held special significance. Usually, it was a letter from a particularly intimate friend, or one that contained secrets about vampires. In an age when e-mail had become the main form of communication, the vampires still preferred regular letters. Tomoe particularly enjoyed slitting the seal open and unfolding a letter, and he received the envelope from the butler with good humor.

"What is this?" It was not one of the letters he had been looking forward to. It didn't even bear a postmark. That meant someone had carried it by hand directly to the door and put it in the mailbox. "Anthony, do you know when this was delivered?"

"I'm very sorry, but it was midday, and I, too, was sleeping."

"Professor Ohata seems to be a very determined man." The envelope was addressed to Taichi Yamagami-sama. Tomoe knew that it was wrong to open a letter addressed to someone else, but he had a rationalization ready. "Anthony, this was not delivered by the post office, so I believe that we can treat it as harassment. Please dispose of it."

"Yes, sir." The butler smiled.

"But first, I think we must make sure that there's nothing dangerous inside."

"You're right, sir." The butler seemed to be enjoying his role as an accomplice.

Tomoe put on a dressing gown and used the letter opener the butler handed him. Inside were several sheets of paper covered with typewritten words.

"So he came to issue a direct invitation..."

The letter, which was addressed to Taichi Yamagami-sama, contained basically the same things the two men had talked about the night before. It explained that Ohata was a folklorist who had some information about Taichi's grandmother, and it invited Taichi to join his research group as an assistant.

"He'll start the boy off as an assistant, but at some point he'll sell Taichi as a living laboratory sample." Tomoe balled up the letter and began to throw it away, but something stopped him. "Where is Taichi?"

"I believe he is out jogging again. It's almost time for tea, so I expect he'll be back at any time."

"Jogging—you mean he's gone outside?" Tomoe opened the small ventilation window. The tall Himalayan cedars in the neighbor's yard swayed in the breeze. Between the trees, the new moon was visible.

"Anthony, the moon is out. If you let Taichi out on a night like tonight..."

"So what if he did?" At some point, Taichi had entered the bedroom.

Vampires had thought they were the only ones with the skill to move without attracting attention, but it seemed that Taichi had the same ability. Tomoe hurriedly stuffed the letter into a pocket of his robe.

As though he was hot after running, Taichi began tearing off his clothes. His sturdy upper body didn't seem to feel the cold. He approached Tomoe. "Gramps, there won't be any tea today." Taichi glanced sideways at the butler, laughing as he spoke. His face already wore the bold, haughty expression of a young emperor. "Watch if you want to, but it might be a little too much stimulation for someone your age. It's been a while."

"Taichi." Tomoe felt elated. There was more than an hour left until the moon went down. In that time, who knew how many times Taichi planned to enjoy himself?

"Yamagami-sama, the pajamas Tomoe-sama is wearing are expensive silk pajamas from France. They can't easily be replaced in Japan, so please have some self-control and don't tear them off."

"Shut up, old man. I get it, don't tear the pajamas. Fine—Tomoe, take your own pajamas off and get back in bed."

The butler looked as if he wanted to say something else, but realizing that anything he said would be useless, he picked up the empty glass and skillfully put the envelope he was still holding in a pocket before turning and leaving the room.

"Taichi. You must always be a gentleman."

"I am a gentleman—in front of other people. But we're the only ones here. There's no need to put on an act now."

"You've certainly changed." Tomoe slowly removed his dressing gown. He wasn't entirely happy with the idea of just doing whatever Taichi said. He was the older of the two—he should be the one taking the initiative in bed. But he didn't think his wishes would carry much weight in this regard.

"If it gets torn, Gramps'll be mad, but don't go so slow. There's not that much time." While Tomoe was still undoing his buttons, Taichi had already stripped completely.

Tomoe's eyes were drawn to his erect cock. "If you have any consideration for me, you'll use the rose oil."

"If I use that, there'll be a sickly stink. No way. I'll lick you—that'll be good enough, won't it?" Like a vicious beast, Taichi grabbed Tomoe from behind and pushed him onto the bed.

"Ah!"

As Taichi tore off Tomoe's pajama bottoms, he said outrageously, "You've been looking for someone else to screw, haven't you?"

"How many times are you going to say the same thing? Don't willfully misunderstand. I'm not going to betray you."

"Give up chasing Minamikawa. He's got a woman."

"Taichi, you followed Minamikawa?" Tomoe didn't even know about Minamikawa's personal life. He knew his address, of course; as he had entrusted the pub to him, that had required a certificate of residence, but as for who Minamikawa slept with, Tomoe wasn't interested. "He's one of the staff at my pub. Don't do this."

"But you are attached to him." It seemed that Taichi had seen them together after all.

Tomoe had been confident that no one could be more perceptive than he, and he was dumbfounded that he had not been able to sense Taichi.

"I followed him this afternoon. He's living with some woman."

"You shouldn't do things like that!"

"And that forty-something guy—lay off him too, or I'm going to start questioning your taste. Gramps would be ten times better than that guy."

"He's..." Tomoe couldn't think of anything else to say. How could he explain Ohata? Taichi was almost out of control now. If Tomoe told him about Ohata now, he'd certainly go out looking for him.

"Come on—who is he? No matter how you look at it, I'm a better man than him. Or does he know how to make a vampire howl?" Taichi pushed Tomoe face down on the bed and parted his ass cheeks roughly. He examined Tomoe closely.

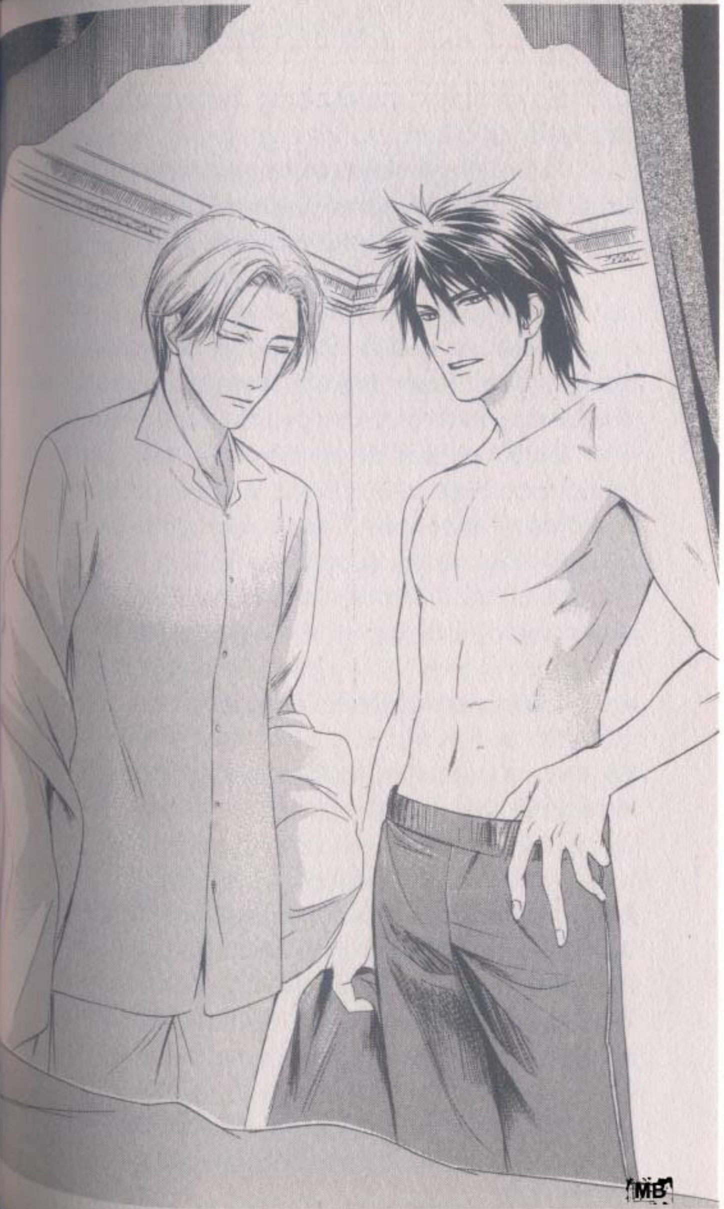
"What are you doing? Do you still doubt me?"

"Shut up. I'm just checking to see if you've been doing it."

"Must you insult me too? Even though I know I would be defeated, I'd like to slap you in the face with a glove and challenge you to a duel." Tomoe was seriously angry. He had never been so humiliated by a lover in all his life. His previous partners had all treated him courteously.

"You've betrayed a lover before. And in addition to that, how many men have you fucked up to now? And you expect me to believe that you could hold out for more than a week?"

"How many years do you think I've been alive?" Tomoe cried out without thinking, but instantly regretted it.



If Taichi was twenty-four, Tomoe was more than five times older.

"Don't think that excuses your betrayal."

"For the last time: I haven't betrayed you! If you've been following me, you know that!"

"You'd only need five minutes, and I couldn't go into that store."

"That was a café. You just go there to drink tea. You just don't know enough about the world." Tomoe was furious; he tried to escape from under Taichi.

But Taichi had no intention of letting him go and forced him back down on the bed. He jabbed a thick finger into Tomoe's ass. "You're always so tight at first. I guess it's because you heal so well."

"Hn! Ah!" Tomoe realized that Taichi's jealousy was extremely unusual for any man, special or ordinary. He seemed to even be angry of his other self.

"Aaah...aaah!" Taichi's finger felt so good. Tomoe was able to feel pleasure build deep within his body. Without such feelings, he wondered if he would be able to continue to enjoy life.

But Tomoe had left behind much of his freedom on the patch of ground where he had been shot. He had lost it because of his greed and lust. He had betrayed his lover time and again, until the man could no longer stand it. Luckily, because Tomoe's body was never found, his lover escaped going to prison. But until the day he died, his lover relived the moment when he had pulled the trigger over and over.

Tomoe knew that he was to blame. He felt that he deserved to suffer. Maybe this was why Taichi was a

perfect partner for him. His jealousy, which was constant to the point of becoming tedious, meant that he would torment Tomoe as long as they were together.

"What's that older guy's name?" Taichi continued to question Tomoe while he moved his finger in and out of the viscount's body.

"He has...nothing to do with us. It's work."

"Work? Do you usually rush out of the house at that time of night for work? I don't think he's just a work buddy."

"Ah, aaah—I can't take it." Tomoe shook with pleasure and almost pain as Taichi's finger moved deep inside him. The outside of his body registered only a fraction of sensation—heat, cold, or pain—but the feelings that remained inside were proof that he was still living. A sweet pain spread throughout his body as the finger viciously prodded him.

"If you want me to treat you nice, tell me the truth."

"Uhnn..." Tomoe suddenly felt obstinate. Ohata knew more about Taichi than Taichi did. There was no way Tomoe was going to let Taichi know about the professor. He clamped his lips shut.

"There's no time. The moon will be down soon. If you don't want to talk, then fine. I have another use for that mouth." Taichi sat up on the bed and yanked Tomoe's head toward his cock.

"N-no!"

"What? You're the one who taught me how we can both enjoy ourselves."

"I don't like being forced."

"Then tell me what I want to know." Taichi pushed Tomoe's head lower, and Tomoe had no choice but to take that thick cock into his mouth. He wondered what would happen if he bit down. He couldn't drink men's blood, and Taichi's blood was probably dangerous to him. If he had an allergic reaction, it would probably kill him. With Taichi's cock filling his mouth, he looked up. When he did so, he was surprised to find Taichi looking down at him with a serious expression on his face.

"Was your first lover kind to you?" Taichi gently stroked Tomoe's hair. "I suppose that all of your other lovers have been kind."

Instead of answering, Tomoe used his tongue skillfully. He had pleasured many other men with that tongue, but this was the first time he had tasted Taichi.

"I'll make you forget all of those kind, gentle men. I'll make it so that you always remember me first."

Tomoe released Taichi and faced him with a tender smile. "You don't have to worry about that. If you die, I will bathe in the morning sun next to your grave. I'll stay there and let the sun burn me all day. That way, it will all be over."

When his parents died, one after the other, and when the lover who had shot him died alone in a hospital, Tomoe had had similar thoughts. What was the use of enjoying the life that Madame had given him? But Tomoe had carried on. He doubted that he would be able to start over and find a new lover if Taichi died, though. He didn't think he'd be able to find anyone else to share his secret or accept him for what he was. Furthermore, there didn't seem to be any meaning anymore to a

solitary existence.

"You're lying." Taichi touched Tomoe's cheek with a trembling hand. "What about Gramps? Are you just going to leave him alone?"

"No matter what happens to me, Anthony won't live very long. When a vampire's sleep becomes shallow, it means he doesn't have much time left."

Both men fell silent. They were picturing the butler suddenly gone, leaving only his clothes behind.

"Taichi. You must be kinder to him. He's not young."

"I'm sorry—I'll try harder to be nice."

Tomoe laughed. The irritation and anger of a few minutes ago had disappeared. "Taichi, if you're not going to make love to me, just tell me."

"What do you mean?"

"If you won't make love to me, then on nights with no moon, I'll do my best to entice you." Tomoe now seemed ready to fight for what he wanted.

Upon hearing these words, Taichi once again pushed Tomoe down on the bed and thrust roughly into him. "Don't do that. I don't want to have to be jealous of myself. I know that a shy guy like him is a better match for you."

"If you understand that, then you should try to be a little bit more like him. And he should try to be a little bit more like you."

"And how are we supposed to do that?" Taichi kissed Tomoe feverishly. The moon was slipping further toward the horizon, but Tomoe felt no urgency. He knew he'd meet his wild-Taichi again tomorrow night. And the gentle young man would never be far away.

"Akihiro, when you go to see other men, take me with you. If you tell me to keep my distance, I will, but I'm sure I can handle myself."

"All right, I'll take you next time." Tomoe wanted to relieve Taichi's uneasiness, so he touched his artery and whispered, "You don't have to worry. You're the best lover I've ever had. Taichi, don't you think that it's more important to be my last lover than my first?"

"Your last lover..." These words seemed to satisfy Taichi. He came inside Tomoe so hard that Tomoe could feel it deep inside.

"That's right...that's good...if you could just be a little gentler." It had been awhile, and Taichi seemed interested in pleasing only himself.

"I'm trying to be gentle." Taichi's release made his movements in and out of Tomoe's tight passage easier; his actions became less frenzied.

Tomoe had intended to try to show Taichi that there were rules and manners in the bedroom as well, but in his impatience, Taichi was in no mood to listen. There was no helping it. He'd have to take care of himself. Tomoe made sure that Taichi could see him as he began playing with his own nipple.

When Taichi saw this, he roughly swept Tomoe's hand out of the way and replaced it with his own. "Don't do such sexy things! It's too much stimulus when I'm cranked up like this."

"Then you do it. I was going to show you things—have you already forgotten your promise?"

"There's no time." But he continued to gently stimulate Tomoe's nipple, and then he began sucking on it. His awkward movements continued for a while, but soon his hips started moving violently again.

Tomoe felt disappointed—it seemed that they were back to square one.

When the moon was out, every night was like a loud party. Taichi literally thrummed with tension. He ate more, he drank more, and every night, he used Tomoe until the viscount screamed.

And then the full moon came. The large blood-red circle rose slowly over the city. It looked close enough to touch, and not even the neon lights outshone it. It had nearly reached its zenith.

"It's party time!" For the first time in his life, Taichi wore a suit that had been tailored for him. The material was a silver-gray color, and Tomoe had given him a tie to match the suit, designed with a moon pattern.

"It looks better on me than I thought it would."

Tomoe was pleased too. Taichi cleaned up very nicely indeed. It would have been hard to find anyone to match his lover's good looks. He reminded Tomoe of a Prohibition-era gangster.

"Japanese tailors are nothing to sneeze at, after all. They've turned Japan's number one barbarian into something resembling a gentleman." Even Tomoe's sharp joke did not rouse Taichi's anger. As he admired himself in the mirror, Taichi popped a champagne cork and drank straight from the bottle.

"Tomoe-sama. Are you going out tonight?" The butler looked worried.

"Don't worry—Taichi just wants to go out drinking tonight."

"You went out last night, and the night before. Yamagami-sama seems fine, but I'm worried about your health."

"Don't worry. I'm taking sustenance four times a day now. I'm doing fine."

"Our food bill this month was the largest it has ever been."

In contrast to the butler's melancholy tone, Tomoe sounded happy. "I'm not surprised. I used to think of the kitchen as just a place to make tea, but it's certainly seeing a lot of use these days."

The man for whom the aforementioned kitchen was being used put on his new shoes and laughed. "Akihiro, let's go."

"Where do you want to go tonight? How about a theme park?"

"Maybe you should check in at your pub once in a while," Taichi suggested unexpectedly.

Thinking that Taichi might still be harboring doubts about Minamikawa, Tomoe cocked an eyebrow at him. "What are you planning?"

"I want to help out somehow. I don't think that kind of pub suits you—you should open a higher-class place."

"Thank you for your offer, but..." It was Tomoe's turn to look uneasy. What if Taichi felt desire for the

women customers in his pub? The very idea bothered Tomoe.

"I'm fine now. No matter how much we investigate, my body's not going to change. But more than that, I want to work, for your sake. During the day, when you can't move, I'll work in your place."

As Tomoe buttoned up the jacket of his three-piece pinstripe suit, he thought that Taichi's words sounded more like ones spoken by his day-self, and he wondered if it was the champagne speaking.

"Thank you. I'll accept your kind offer. But, Taichi, you have to behave like a gentleman in the pub at all times. That's my only source of funds in Japan."

"I understand, sir. Don't underestimate my learning ability."

The two men left the house together. Tomoe stole a glance at the shrubbery surrounding the house. He was worried that Ohata might be concealed there, watching them. Since that first day, he had seen neither hide nor hair of the man. If the professor had forgotten about them or given up, Tomoe was grateful, but he didn't really believe that to be true.

After they got into the car, Tomoe opened his bag, took out the letter from Ohata, and handed it to Taichi. He trusted Taichi had been sincere when he spoke earlier, and he wanted to return the show of good faith.

"What's this?"

"Have you already forgotten? This is a love letter from that fortyish guy I met at the café the night you followed me."

"Screw that!" Taichi crumpled the paper and began to throw it away, but Tomoe stopped him quickly.

"Look at it carefully. It's not addressed to me. It's a love letter to you."

"Me? Why am I getting something like that from a forty-year-old guy?"

"Read it! Calm down and read it carefully."

Taichi opened up the crumpled letter and began reading.

"I didn't tell you earlier because I didn't want you to go to him. It seems that no matter how long I live, I still haven't grown up. I didn't trust you, and so I did something stupid."

"There's no way I'd go to him. I don't know who the hell he is."

"It's not written there, but I think he wants to sell the secret to your marvelous strength to the highest paying science lab."

As if he hadn't understood the first time, Taichi began reading the letter again. "It doesn't say that anywhere here."

"Ohata's first mistake was in dealing with me. As you know, I can easily read people's true intentions. This unique ability is what allows vampires to survive in the city."

"Well, why didn't he come directly to me?"

"I think it was his plan to make sure his offer wasn't refused."

"Exactly how much does this guy know?"

Tomoe had no answer to this.

Because Taichi's life on the mountain had been simple, there was very little he could tell Tomoe. What he did know came from living with his grandmother. As a professor of folklore, Ohata had been in a position to gather much more information.

Tomoe spoke as calmly and honestly as possible: "Professor Ohata is an expert on Inugami. He may be able to tell you something about your roots." He was able to say this only because he no longer feared that Taichi would leave the minute he heard the news.

Taichi crumpled the letter up again. "I don't need to know that stuff anymore. As I've watched you, I've begun to think that this is fate; I should just accept it and live happily ever after."

"Are you sure? He may know about your parents."

"What did they ever do for me? You and Gramps are the ones who taught me table manners. The woman who raised me is dead. It would seem like digging up old graves, and I don't want to do it."

The car was stopped at a light. Taichi looked at the young man next to them; it was some punk riding a motorcycle. Feeling irritated, Taichi gave him the finger. It looked like a fight might erupt, but upon seeing Taichi's powerful body, the biker decided that flight was the better idea.

"Ohata said that your family is very healthy. That they live a long time. I'm hoping very much that that is true. The longer I can live with you, the better."

At those words, Taichi turned his face away, but not before Tomoe saw a tear slide down his cheek. Even Taichi could be moved to tears. It happened very rarely, but now was one of those moments.

"I feel like I want to howl at the sky." Taichi stuck his head out of the window and looked up. The moon had risen even higher, and everything was bathed in an unusual brightness.

"It really is a beautiful night. The whole world seems to sparkle." In a very good mood, Tomoe parked the car in his usual space. As always, there was already a line of luxury cars parked in the garage.

Taichi glanced at them and said, "I can already remember the names of all the cars. That's a Porsche, that's a Mercedes-Benz, and that's an MR. Do all of these cars belong to the guys who work in your pub?"

"That's right. Showing off in great cars is also part of the job."

"If I get my license, you have to buy me a big car." Taichi made this outrageous demand without an ounce of hesitation. This newfound confidence made Tomoe that much happier.

As they approached the entrance to the pub, Tomoe again hesitated. This was a time when customers would be present. "Taichi, I'm not very good around women. Let's just take a quick look around and then leave right away."

"Okay. I just want to see what kind of business this is."

Taichi was very relaxed, but Tomoe felt almost unbearably anxious. He was worried that as soon as the bittersweet pheromones emitted by the young women hit Taichi, the wild beast within him would awaken. Tomoe had dispelled his worry about Ohata, but a new one now arose to take its place. He had some bad memories because of Taichi's unwarranted jealousy, but now it was Tomoe's turn to cage the green-eyed monster.

The door opened to reveal a whole other world, and Tomoe felt a pang of regret. It wasn't just the smell of makeup or perfume. The room was filled with the bittersweet odor emitted by women. It was enough to make him dizzy. An ordinary man would feel sexual desire when bombarded with those female pheromones, but Tomoe felt only his need to feed rising quickly.

He looked at Taichi from time to time, but he was ignoring the women. His attention was instead focused on the nearly twenty staff members.

"There are a lot of seemingly gentle men here—just your type."

Tomoe was surprised at these words. It seemed that they had both been worried about the other's reaction.

"Sir, excuse me. I didn't realize you were here." Minamikawa hurried over to Tomoe and stood before him, smiling. He glanced at Taichi, who was standing behind Tomoe.

Taichi gazed back as if staring down a rival. The full moon was up, and Taichi's animal instincts were revved up.

Minamikawa must have sensed the antagonism directed at him. "May I be introduced to your companion?" He was obviously on the alert, thinking that Tomoe might have brought in a new host.

"Ah, this is my cousin, Taichi Yamagami. I'd like to have him do office work in the afternoons." As Tomoe said this, Taichi pulled away and sat at the end of the counter. "He doesn't know much about this kind of business, so I brought him over to see it."

Minamikawa still looked confused.

Taichi stared at the tables. He was listening to the conversations taking place there. "Humph. So all you have to do to make money is make women feel good? The city sure is different."

Taichi's insensitive comment clearly irked Minamikawa.

Tomoe tried to smooth things over. "It's not quite that simple. A customer is a customer, woman or not. If we don't send them home feeling happy, they won't come back again. It's a very sensitive job."

Taichi just snorted in disdain. "It all seems idiotic to me. Everyone's just laughing and making noise. Those guys should pay attention to the fact that they're men."

"Female customers are delicate," Minamikawa said, but Taichi ignored him.

"It's too servile. They must do this work because they don't have confidence in their own charms. They should be manlier."

"That...would just drive these women away." Minamikawa was growing more and more annoyed.

Taichi continued to address only Tomoe: "Akihiro, I'm not worried anymore. There's no one here who's manlier than me. I thought that you might be building your own harem here, with all these pretty boys."

"Taichi!" So much for calling Taichi his cousin—the truth had been revealed. Minamikawa now knew what their relationship was. But it seemed that Taichi had done it on purpose.

Tomoe looked at Minamikawa, who had turned red and seemed very uncomfortable.

"Minamikawa-kun, I apologize. He doesn't know the ways of the world very well."

"It's nothing." Minamikawa's expression hadn't changed, but he seemed a bit agitated. He had a great deal of respect and affection for Tomoe, and he had suffered something of a shock.

"Minamikawa, is it? When Akihiro comes here alone, if he tries to tempt any of you, you'd better watch out. You stick to the customers, or I'll show you what a real man acts like."

Tomoe and Minamikawa, at a loss for words, just exchanged glances.

"So, what next? Are you going to greet the customers, Akihiro? If you're the owner, you should act like it and keep the customers happy."

"No, I...I don't like women." Tomoe looked to Minamikawa for help.

Taichi stood between the two of them, breaking their gaze. "Minamikawa-san, what's the best liquor in this place?"

"Hennessy."

"What kind is that?"

"Brandy," Minamikawa said to the bartender, who produced a bottle. He thought that Taichi was demanding some for himself.

"It's not pretty. Don't you have anything that's...cuter?"

"How about this? It's very popular with our customers." Minamikawa showed him a bottle of Dom Perignon Pink. Although he had initially felt antagonism toward Taichi, for some reason, Minamikawa now found himself docilely following the young man's lead.

"Okay, prepare enough of this for all the guests."

"Taichi..."

"Tomoe—it's cheap compared to the stuff you drink every day." Taichi suddenly stood up.

All eyes were drawn to him immediately. The employees instantly feared that if he were introduced as a new host, he would steal all of their customers from them.

"Minamikawa, introduce me to them as the owner. Of course, Tomoe is really the owner, but he can't go near the women. I'll take his place."

"Tomoe-san?" Minamikawa's expression was asking if it were all right. That wasn't surprising. This guy had come here for the first time and was already using Minamikawa's name informally and giving orders.

"It's all right. Let Taichi do as he wishes." Tomoe had no choice.

Taichi straightened his suit and necktie. No one would have known that he was wearing a suit for the first time. "Right, let's go."

Quiet-Taichi would never have acted this way. But it was a full moon. Taichi's body and spirit were at their highest levels of aggression.

Accompanied by Minamikawa, Taichi visited each table. He personally filled each woman's glass and greeted her with a kiss on the hand. The women were very excited. The hosts also relaxed. The noise level at the tables doubled.

"Where on earth did he learn to do that?" Tomoe watched in fascination as Taichi made his rounds. Suddenly, he realized that Taichi's actions resembled his own. Taichi was mimicking Tomoe's mannerisms, which had been honed by years of refinement. But performed by Taichi, who could not hide his sheer masculinity, it looked more like an act. This paradox, however, seemed perfect for a pub like this one, and the customers clamored for his attention.

"He's amazing." Tomoe smiled as he watched Taichi. Among all these men with their expensive suits and carefully groomed hair, Taichi stood out. He was the sexiest and most vital man in the room.

Perhaps because he wasn't really interested in any of the women, Taichi was able to converse with them easily and to draw laughs readily.

The bartender, who had also been watching Taichi, commented, "If he made an appearance here every night, our sales would triple."

"Perhaps, but I don't think I would like that." Tomoe was frank about his feelings, as the bartender had also been there when Taichi revealed the nature of their relationship.

"Did you buy this place for him? He's a very lucky guy." The bartender, who knew nothing about the situation, made this assumption, but Tomoe did not grow angry.

"I didn't buy it for him. I'm no good with women, but...I bought it to return a favor."

"To return a favor?"

"I owe a lot to various women. You have a mother, don't you?" Tomoe's question was somewhat misleading, but he couldn't exactly tell his bartender that it was women's blood that had allowed him to live for so many years. "So I decided to open a pub that women could enjoy."

At that moment, a high voice could be clearly heard above the general clamor. Tomoe quickly looked for the source of the noise. One particularly daring (and drunk) woman had pulled Taichi into an embrace and was kissing him passionately.

The two men emerged from the lively pub and walked onto the cool street. Tomoe was in a bad mood. Before he knew it, Tomoe was leveling accusations at Taichi. "You got rather swept up in things, didn't you?"

Taichi replied calmly, "Look here, I was just stroking the cattle. You don't have to get jealous."

After making rounds at all the tables, Taichi had surveyed the room. Conversations were now very lively. It seemed that the hosts, determined not to be defeated by Taichi, had really stepped up their game.

"Don't compare women to cows."

"But for you, that's kind of what they are, right?"

"Not at all. I have a lot of respect for women."

"Don't worry—I don't remember any of them. There's really no need for jealousy. Were you irritated?" Taichi asked this with a laugh.

Tomoe was not amused that Taichi could so clearly

see through him. "I'm glad that you are interested in working there. You should get your license. I'll get a car for you."

As Tomoe watched the cars passing in the street next to them, he wondered what kind of automobile would suit Taichi. The next moment, he sensed an odd presence behind them. He suddenly pushed Taichi away. He used all his strength to do so, and Taichi flew to the side before landing on the ground.

As though in slow motion, Tomoe saw Taichi's face turn toward him in surprise. And then he felt something hit his back. It was just like the shock he had felt when his first lover had shot him. The world seemed to stop. But Tomoe's body continued to move, folding slowly toward the ground. Oddly, there was no pain, but he could feel the ends of bones grinding against each other. Inside, he was completely broken.

Tomoe saw a phantom in the road. It was an old man in a wheelchair.

His former lover, looming over Tomoe as he had when Tomoe was dying, laughed.

Tomoe whispered, "Forgive me. I don't love you anymore. I want that wild wolf-man over there."

The man stood up from the wheelchair and extended his hand, as though inviting Tomoe to accompany him. Behind him, Tomoe could see the figures of his parents, who looked just as they did in their portrait. They beckoned Tomoe to come.

"Mother...I can't go. Father...I'm a man. I can't die without a fight. I must save my lonely werewolf."

Tomoe's body finally crumpled to the earth with a horrible sound, and time returned to normal.

"Akihiro!" Taichi screamed.

A car, its engine still running hot, was lodged on top of Tomoe's right leg. His lungs had been crushed, and he couldn't speak.

Taichi jumped up and bounded over to where Tomoe lay. He easily lifted the car up and pulled Tomoe away.

"You bastard! What have you done?!" Taichi shattered the glass of the car's side window with his bare hand.

As he did so, a man got out of the driver's side, a frantic expression on his face. "We'll take him to the hospital in my car. That'll be faster than waiting for an ambulance. The hospital's right there." The man pointed to a hospital less than three hundred feet away.

The man's voice was familiar. It was Ohata.

"Urgh." When Tomoe tried to talk, his mouth filled with blood. *What a waste,* he thought. A glass of blood was so expensive. The blood provided by those healthy young women on that southern isle. Tomoe wanted to say this, but he couldn't. He tried to swallow, but his throat wouldn't move. The vital blood pooled in his mouth and fell to the ground, drop by precious drop.

"You son of a bitch! If Akihiro dies, I'll tear you to pieces right here!" Taichi cradled Tomoe's head in his lap and glared up at Ohata with glowing red eyes.

"Calm down. We'll take him to the hospital. We'll get the best doctors, and he'll receive the best care."

"If you're thinking of running, forget about it. I know your face. I'll follow you to the depths of hell!"

"I'm not going to run away. We need to get him to a hospital now. Hurry up!"

Ohata got into the car and gestured to Taichi, who picked Tomoe up and put him gently on the backseat.

No, Taichi! That's Ohata. He's the man who wants to take you away from me. Don't get in the car! Tomoe tried to warn Taichi, but still the words would not come out.

"Urgh...ahhh...guh."

Tomoe tried urgently to speak, and blood dyed the front of his white silk shirt.

Taichi's suit was also covered in blood. "Akihiro, don't try to talk. You're losing blood." Taichi pressed a handkerchief against Tomoe's mouth.

"They'll be able to help him at the hospital. He's losing a lot of blood. They'll give him a transfusion—I'll donate blood too. What's your blood type?" Ohata cleverly turned the conversation to blood transfusions, pretending to assuage Taichi's worries.

Taichi had no idea what his blood type was. In the current situation, he would probably submit to an examination of his blood with no questions asked. No doubt Ohata planned to steal a sample of the young man's blood. He would then take that sample to a medical research facility or pharmaceutical company and try to sell it. He was the kind of man who would do something like that.

Tomoe was sure that his ideas about this man were correct.

"Here's the hospital. I'll go call a nurse." Ohata pulled into the hospital parking lot.

Tomoe dipped a finger into his blood and wrote on Taichi's pants leg, "OHATA. RUN." Just writing that much was difficult.

"Hm?"

Taichi kept his wits about him. Without making a sound, he watched as Ohata got out of the car and ran into the hospital.

"So that's Ohata."

"NO HOSPITAL." That was all Tomoe was able to write before his strength gave out.

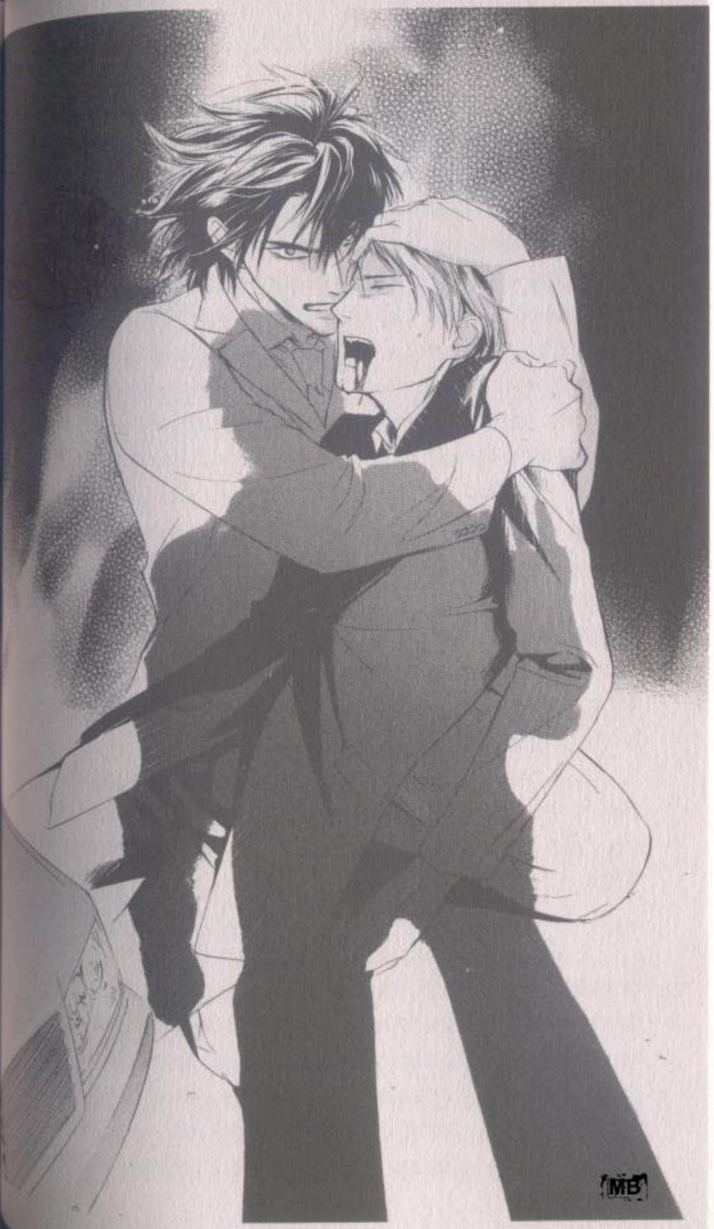
If Tomoe were examined in the hospital, all of his secrets would be laid bare. What would the doctors make of a young man whose body temperature would indicate hypothermia in anyone else, and who had so little blood running through his veins? Even worse, in a hospital room, Tomoe would be unable to escape the sun's rays. He would turn into a charred husk right in front of the hospital employees. No matter what, he didn't want to die in a hospital. He had already decided he would die on Taichi's grave.

Taichi said, "No hospital...of course. In the confusion, I completely forgot that you are different from others. Okay, I'm going to move you now. Will you be all right?"

With a weak nod, Tomoe signaled his willingness.

Taichi got out of the car, lifted Tomoe into his arms, and began running. If he didn't hurry, Ohata would return with hospital staff.

"Akihiro, don't die. Whatever happens, don't die before me. You're the one meant to live a long time."



Tomoe opened his eyes slightly. Behind Taichi, he could see the full moon. Somehow it reminded him of Madame when she laughed.

Tomoe could hear Madame's voice in his ear: "Akihiro Sanders Tomoe. You are not a full vampire, so it may be difficult for you to live a truly long life. Think of this as a second chance and enjoy life to the fullest."

Oui, Madame. I will enjoy what's left of my life. So please give me one more chance. I don't want to die like this and leave my beloved wolf-man behind. I love him. Tomoe sent this silent entreaty toward the moon.

"Akihiro, running with you in my arms like this is too conspicuous. I'm going to go get the car. Wait here for me." Taichi concealed Tomoe in an empty lot behind the hospital. He meant to immediately get the car but found himself unable to move. What if Tomoe died while he was gone? The blood had stopped flowing from his mouth. What if he had already lost most of the blood his body held?

"I've got it—I'll give him some of mine." Taichi sat down on the ground and laid Tomoe's head on his lap. He suddenly bit into his own left wrist. "Here Akihiro, drink this."

He let his blood to flow into Tomoe's mouth.

No. A man's blood won't work! Tomoe thought to himself sadly. Still, this was an expression of Taichi's love. And perhaps Taichi's blood would be different. If he were going to die anyway, it didn't matter if it was from an allergic reaction to Taichi's blood. Tomoe used his final bit of strength to begin drinking.

Usually, Tomoe would begin choking right away. This time he didn't, and the blood didn't taste bitter, as he had expected. Maybe it was because his tongue was numb, but all Tomoe could feel was the warmth of the blood spreading throughout his body.

"You don't have to worry about me. It's the full moon. No matter how much blood you take from me, I'll still be strong enough to fight off two bears." Taichi sighed. "Maybe this won't work. But I can't just stand by and let you die. I always come inside of you—think of it like that...and hold on."

Taichi's reasoning was somewhat faulty, and Tomoe would have laughed at him, but now he didn't even have the strength to shake his head. All he could do was lie there and feel Taichi's blood seep into his body.

"I'll be back. I'll be right back. So don't die! Wait for me!" After giving Tomoe a great deal of blood, Taichi wrapped a handkerchief around his wrist and ran off to get the car. His hair, which had already grown out again, swept behind him as he disappeared from view.

Tomoe was left alone in the still night with only the moon to look out for him.

The spirit of Tomoe's former lover appeared again, breaking the silence. This time, he appeared not as an old man, but as the beautiful uniformed officer he had been when Tomoe first met him. "If I had really loved you, I could never have shot you."

At which party had they met? When Tomoe said he couldn't dance well, the officer showed him how. Although the soldier should have been dancing the woman's part so that Tomoe could learn the man's steps, he cleverly maneuvered it so that soon he was leading Tomoe. In the shadows of the garden, they danced together. At some point, the dance turned into an embrace, and Tomoe found his first lover.

But their love had to be hidden. He was a military officer, serving under Tomoe's father. For ten years, they met clandestinely; but toward the end, both of them were growing weary of the relationship. Tomoe's parents were pressing him to get married. He had tried to put them off by telling them he was busy with his new job managing a hotel, but they refused to be patient any longer.

It was then that Tomoe, as though possessed by an evil sprit, began an affair with a young bellboy.

Tomoe had never blamed his former lover for shooting him. He had, in fact, intended to apologize to him and seek his forgiveness, but somehow forty years flew by, and his former lover had become an old man. It was then that Tomoe realized how pitiless a master time was. He decided that true love was just an illusion, and he began flitting from lover to lover.

The spirit of his former lover said gently, "If I had really loved you, I would have thought of ways that we could have lived together. Tomoe, it's enough. Go with him. I set you free. You've suffered enough. But think of me sometimes."

Suddenly the apparition disappeared—but Tomoe was now surrounded by large black beasts.

Who...who are you?

Something growled loudly next to his ear.

I'm different, just like you, Tomoe beseeched silently. *I don't have fangs or claws, but that doesn't make me any less different.*

At this, the beasts' eyes turned a glowing red, and they began to howl.

He says he's one of us.

One of us.

He is that other's chosen.

The beasts paced around Tomoe as they spoke with each other.

This is a male.

He cannot bear children.

But they seemed to agree that it didn't matter.

It's none of your business. Leave us alone. Again Tomoe cried out silently. *The two of us, we're both different. He has nobody. He's lost. So I will take care of him. I'll pen him up forever in a cage made of love.*

Suddenly, one of the beasts jumped on top of Tomoe and covered him like a shroud. The rest of the beasts collapsed in a circle around him.

"Where did he go? How could no one see him go, holding a bleeding man like that?"

It was Ohata, walking through the weeds of the empty lot. Among the phantoms surrounding him, Ohata stood out to Tomoe.

"He's got to be hidden around here somewhere. Damn, was Tomoe also one of Yamagami's kind? I didn't think he'd have such strength. Anyone else's ribs would have been completely crushed."

Ohata was right next to Tomoe. It was a bright, moonlit night. Tomoe should have been clearly visible to him. But Ohata walked right past him, unaware. It seemed that the beasts had hidden Tomoe from his sight.

"Tomoe's blood would do, too. I have to have at least four ounces, though." Ohata slashed at the withered weeds as he wandered aimlessly about, but he eventually give up and headed back to the hospital.

When Ohata was out of range, the beasts disappeared, and Tomoe was alone again. But he no longer felt anxious. Deep inside, he felt a warmth building. He could see clearly again, and he could hear things happening far away. In the distance, he heard the sound of a familiar engine. It was the jet-black Jaguar—the most beautiful car in the world to Tomoe.

But Taichi didn't even have a license. How was he coping with driving such a powerful car? Tomoe hoped he wouldn't get arrested. He prayed that Taichi would somehow make his way safely back to him.

Soon the car drew near. Taichi drove right up to where Tomoe lay. He opened the back door. "Thank God you're still alive!" He breathed a huge sigh of relief and bent down, gently kissing Tomoe's blood-drenched lips. Taichi produced a blanket he had acquired from the trunk and wrapped Tomoe up in it. "Everything's going to be all right. Let's go home. To the house we share. Let's go home, okay?" Even though the moon was full, Taichi's voice was soft. He lifted Tomoe in his arms and began walking, their forms illuminated by moonlight.

That's right. He'll take me home.

His mind at rest at the thought that he would soon be in the home he shared with Taichi and Anthony, Tomoe finally lost consciousness.

When Taichi opened the door, Anthony was standing there, as always. When he saw what Taichi was carrying, he looked shocked.

"Gramps...no, Mister Anthony Sterns. I'm sorry. Akihiro was hit by a car because he was with me."

"Hit by a car?"

"I want to help him. Please! I beg you! Show me what to do!"

The butler closed the door and locked it securely before gesturing upstairs. "Take him to the bedroom. Make sure the room is completely dark. If even a little light finds its way in..."

"Isn't there a coffin in this house somewhere? I thought vampires usually slept in coffins."

"Tomoe-sama is not a full vampire. He's more human. To put it frankly, he's a misfit. If his body temperature drops too far, it's not good. We need to put him to bed and warm him up."

"I'll do it."

They entered the bedroom, and Taichi laid Tomoe on the bed. They both worked together to strip the viscount of his blood-soaked clothes.

"Where is he hurt?"

"His leg was smashed. He was hit hard in the back, and he vomited up a lot of blood."

"Blood. I must prepare fresh blood." The butler examined the damage to Tomoe's leg and then searched hurriedly for something that could be used as a splint. As he did so, his mind worked furiously.

"Won't the stuff he usually drinks work?"

"That is mixed with fruit juice and then frozen. Usually it's enough, but when he's been hurt this badly, he'll need fresh blood."

"I'll do that too. He can drink my blood."

"That won't do. Tomoe-sama can't accept men's blood. If it's not blood from a woman..."

"We don't have any of that. He drank some of my blood a little while ago."

At Taichi's words, the butler again looked shocked. "What were you thinking?! Did you think at all about the consequences if he couldn't accept your blood?!"

"There was no time to think!"

In place of a splint, the butler wrapped Tomoe's leg securely in a blanket and used string to tie it tight. He did this in offended silence. After wrapping the leg, the butler straightened the wounded appendage out on the bed and fixed it in place with more string.

"Is that all you're going to do? Will it heal that way?"

"If you've been hurt before, you should understand. The power we have to heal ourselves is beyond that of mere humans."

"Yeah, but...will he be able to heal from this?"

Tomoe's long, beautiful leg was badly damaged. Even from the outside, it was clear that the bone had been bent. His legs were different lengths now, as well.

"Yamagami-sama, please check the sliding door. Then tape the curtains down firmly to the wall, so that no light can get through."

Taichi did as requested. There was no way any light at all was getting into that room. "Mister Anthony?"

"There's no need to call me 'mister.'"

"Well, Anthony, then. Can you also see in the dark?"

"I am one of Tomoe-sama's kind. Now, I have to talk with our fellow vampires immediately and see if I can find a woman who will give us some blood."

"There's no need for that. I'll give him mine."

"Yamagami-sama, you can't..."

"Anthony, who is the master here?"

Taichi sounded so much like Tomoe that the butler was struck silent. The two men glared at each other over Tomoe's still body. The butler was the first to break the silence: "My master is Tomoe-sama."

"So does Tomoe's partner hold that position too? Or is he subordinate to you? Answer that."

"He...has an important position."

"As long as you understand that. I am Akihiro's life partner. So I'm giving him my blood. You don't have any complaints about that, do you?"

"If there is even the slightest sign of rejection, you must stop immediately. And it would be helpful if you could think about how to find fresh blood."

But Taichi wasn't listening any longer, and the butler was aware of this. He gave up, deciding that if Tomoe died now, it was the hand of fate. If Tomoe was going to die anyway, the butler knew that his master would be happier dying with the taste of his lover's blood in his mouth. "How much should I give him?"

"About four ounces every six hours; but what about you?"

"It's the full moon, and I'm at my full strength. You don't need to worry about me." Taichi took off his suit, threw it on the floor, and lay down next to Tomoe. When he made to bite his wrist again, the butler instead offered him a sharp knife.

"A clean wound will heal faster. I will prepare food downstairs so that you will be able to eat whenever you need to. Please take care of yourself."

"Okay."

The butler left the dark room, navigating his way as though it were as bright as day.

Taichi was left alone with Tomoe. Unable to hold the viscount's cold body as tightly as he wanted, he carefully molded himself to the other man's prone figure.

"Don't die, Akihiro. I wanted to strike Ohata down on the spot, but I controlled myself. I didn't want to get involved with the law. No police, no hospital. You can never go to anyone for help. It's amazing you survived this long." Taichi spoke to Tomoe, although he didn't know whether the man could hear him or not. If he didn't keep talking, Taichi worried that Tomoe's soul would leave his body and go somewhere far away, never to return.

He held his wrist up to Tomoe's mouth and let the blood flow. Being careful not to spill any, Taichi continued to feed Tomoe. Although he couldn't see outside, his instincts said that daybreak was near. He thought about his birthplace.

The morning scenery was always beautiful. Every day, as the sun rose over the mountains, rose-colored clouds streamed by overhead. He remembered the chilly morning fog that would gather around his feet. The sound of birdcalls would fill the air, and small animals would scurry in the fields. Fish would splash the surface of the river, and small crabs would sidle slowly over the rocks. He felt truly sad that he would never be able to show those sights to Tomoe.

Although he was no poet, Taichi murmured softly into Tomoe's ear, describing the things he remembered, almost like a lullaby. He didn't have a large vocabulary, but Taichi's words drifted over Tomoe's ear like a quiet meadow breeze: "It's beautiful at night, too. When the fireflies are in season, the area around the river looks like a street lit up for Christmas. Sometimes the frogs croak so noisily that you can't sleep. I wish I could show it to you, but...that whole area is under water now." When Taichi spoke about his old home, his entire manner of speaking became hypnotic. Although he had no conscious knowledge of how to restore his memory, he was actually doing exactly what he needed to do.

As he spoke, Taichi imagined himself as a large black wolf, running wild through the forest. In Japan, wolves had been exterminated a long time ago. These noble beasts—who had hearts strong enough to fight even bears—had been destroyed by man, whose main weapon was intelligence and ingenuity. But the memories of wolves, who had once ruled the forests, still lingered deep in the mountains.

As Taichi paced through the forest in his new shape, he came upon a beautiful golden-brown wolf. It was said that wolves mate for life.

You are my life-mate.

As Taichi approached the other wolf, he smelled the scent of scattered flowers. The boundary between dreaming and reality had grown thin.

Tomoe's body was still cold, and Taichi couldn't tell if his blood was being absorbed by Tomoe's body or not. Because Tomoe's ribs and spine were probably broken, he couldn't be moved. Time passed as the two lay in bed quietly.

Five days had passed, and Tomoe had not yet woken up. Taichi was eating alone on the terrace. The food, excellently prepared and served by Anthony, tasted like sawdust to him nonetheless. The moon would be out soon, and Taichi thought he would gain strength from it, as well as the food.

"Yamagami-sama. I've prepared food that is high in protein and vitamins to help you manufacture more blood. You must eat it all."

"I know. It's just that...maybe my blood isn't good enough, after all. My wrist will soon be healed. I thought Tomoe would also be better by now." Taichi looked at the vanishing cut on his wrist as he spoke. "Anthony, you used to be human, right? Didn't you ever love anyone?" As always, Taichi was unsure of himself when the moon wasn't out, and Anthony was his only diversion. Taichi had grown to hold the butler in high regard for his absolute calm even when circumstances were at their worst.

"I used to work at Madame's mansion. I was born into a poor family, and when I was ten, I was sold as a servant there. Madame was a very beautiful woman."

"So you liked her?"

"Yes. Even as I became an old man, Madame remained as young and beautiful as when I first saw her. I was, of course, not worthy to touch her, but I wanted to be of use, so I did anything she needed me to. Then one day, the mansion burned down." The butler filled Taichi's glass with fresh orange juice, but his eyes were miles away. "Madame had a favorite horse. I was old and thought I would die soon anyway, so I entered the burning barn and rescued it, but..."

"So she gave you a second chance at life too, like Akihiro."

"Yes, and so I am a second-rate vampire, as well. When she saved Tomoe-sama, she gave him to me for safe-keeping, since I knew what it was like."

"Weren't you sad? Being treated like a thing by Madame?"

"No. When I was changed, my feelings for Madame also changed. Because we are so few in number, we are like a big family. I still loved her, but as a companion or as a part of my family. Tomoe-sama, too, is like a beloved son to me."

The butler raised his eyes to the eastern sky. The half-moon was climbing high, casting a soft light over everything. "It's been one month since you arrived."

"Just one month. It feels as though I've lived here for years. When Akihiro gets better, let's buy a big RV and travel around the country." Taichi thought he would like to show Anthony the beautiful night skies of Japan too. "If we have a freezer and a room sealed against the light, we could travel, couldn't we?"

"First, you have to get your driver's license."

The two men traded smiles. Everything seemed well enough, but both of them were unhappy because their true master was not present. How long would the seat prepared for him remain empty?

"Anthony...do you feel something?" Taichi's head suddenly lifted as though he heard someone calling his name.

"Yes. I think perhaps tonight I had better prepare the juice."

"He's awake?!" Taichi's chair went flying as he bounded toward the bedroom, which was still pitch black. In direct contradiction of the butler's order, he pulled the tape from the curtains and yanked them open to let in the dim moonlight. The pale light illuminated Tomoe's face. His mouth was moving weakly.

"Akihiro!" Taichi gently pulled back the blanket. Some warmth had returned to Tomoe's body, and his leg had regained its former straightness. "Akihiro!"

"I have something selfish to ask of you."

"Akihiro, you're awake!" Taichi immediately pulled Tomoe into a tight embrace and then kissed him gently. Tomoe's lips still tasted of his own blood. He kissed him over and over again. In his joy at Tomoe's recovery, he could think of nothing else.

"Taichi, please."

"What is it? Anything. I'll do anything you want, no matter how selfish. Just ask me."

"Will you make love to me even on nights when the moon isn't out?"

Taichi could only laugh at this unexpected request. But even as he laughed, he seemed to be near tears. "Is that what you want?"

"You mustn't be jealous of your own self. I love you, Taichi. I love you, and so you must make love to me every day. I can no longer endure half a month without being made love to."

"This is the first thing you think of when you wake up?! And I was so worried about you!" His self-control shattered, Taichi lifted Tomoe to a sitting position and wrapped his arms tightly around the viscount. Tomoe still had the same supple muscles; his bones were all intact. His skin was as soft and inviting as ever. "Perfect. You're perfectly healed."

"It's too bad, though. I was hoping to enjoy a magnificent honeymoon while the moon was full."

Tomoe lifted his arm and put it around Taichi's neck. As he embraced Taichi, he looked at the open window. "The moon just reflects the light of the sun, so why does it have such power, I wonder?" As he held his lover, who was so affected by the moon, Tomoe figured he would never be able to answer that question, no matter how long he lived.

"It's *because* it's a reflection. Things that can't live under the true light of day come out under the moonlight because they think it isn't real."

"Wonderful. When did you become a poet?" This time Tomoe kissed Taichi. The young man's lips tasted faintly of orange juice, and Tomoe licked them before thrusting his tongue into Taichi's mouth. It was a very passionate kiss.

"You've just come back from the verge of death, and you're already raring to go—that's just like you."

Tomoe smiled at Taichi. "On the verge of death? I was just having a long nap." He framed Taichi's face with both hands and looked at him closely. "In my dreams, a black wolf was guiding me through a forest. I was a wolf, too."

"A golden-brown wolf, right?"

"Yes. I was able to walk under the sun. Even in the early afternoon on a hot summer day. We bathed in the sun's light, and then finally we climbed a rocky hill. We stood together on a cliff and howled at the moon."

"Arroooooooooh!" Taichi suddenly howled like a wolf.

All of the dogs in the neighborhood began barking and then howling in unison. Both men burst into laughter. But for Taichi, it almost seemed as if the dogs—direct descendants of wolves—were giving their blessings to their king's union.

Taichi took Tomoe's hand in his and pressed his lips to it, silently vowing his eternal love.

"I'm sorry to be late." Anthony appeared with a glass of juice on a silver tray—yet another sign that things had returned to normal.

"Anthony, I'm terribly sorry to have worried you." Tomoe thanked the butler.

An outsider might have thought that these two were playacting, but Taichi knew that they enjoyed living a human life. Anthony could become anything he wanted, but he enjoyed the challenge of being the most competent butler in the world.

In the same way, Tomoe could not live without the challenge of love. If he had someone to love, then he was able to tackle all other challenges with zest.

"Tomoe-sama, should I prepare anything for you?"

"No, Anthony; I'm going out immediately."

"Akihiro!"

"Tomoe-sama!"

The two men who loved him cried out in protest at the same moment.

"What are you saying? You've just opened your eyes for the first time in days! You may not be fully healed yet!" Taichi tried to press Tomoe back onto the bed, but Tomoe evaded his arms and sat up. He stuck out his legs.

"Anthony, take this off."

The butler quietly unwound the blanket from around Tomoe's leg. There were no signs of damage anywhere on Tomoe's nude body. As he stood up under the light of the moon, it was clear that he had been restored to his original perfection.

"Tomoe-sama, where are you going?" The butler sounded worried.

To reassure him, Tomoe picked up the glass of juice and drained it in one gulp. "After drinking Taichi's blood, this seems very weak." Tomoe wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. He turned toward the other two and said coldly, "I am Akihiro Sanders Tomoe, a direct descendant of Viscount Tomoe. The blood of this samurai family is mingled with that of a British naval officer who served his country gallantly. Sadly, I was forbidden to join the navy when I was human because my mother was Japanese."

"Tomoe-sama, what are you planning to do?"

"Did you think I would withdraw without a fight? I will make Ohata pay." Tomoe headed for the bathroom. It was just like Tomoe to pay attention to his personal appearance even when going into battle.

"It you're worried about Ohata, I'll go right now and tear his head off his neck." Taichi followed Tomoe as far as the shower door, trying to deter the viscount from his insane plan.

"No, Taichi. It would be uncivilized to murder him."

"I can't just let him get away with what he did. Leave him to me!"

"I said you mustn't kill him. Japan is a nation of laws. I don't want any trouble." Under the hot water, Tomoe washed off all of the dried blood. His skin had a healthy glow that made it impossible it imagine that just five days earlier his body had been crushed. "Taichi, would you like to join me in the shower?"

"'What the hell are you thinking? What are you planning to do?"

"Just taking his life isn't revenge. I have my own ways." Tomoe laughed, a cold sound that made even Taichi shiver.

The way he was now, Taichi thought Tomoe should be wearing a tuxedo and a black cape. He was fascinated by this other side of the viscount. There was much more to him than just beauty.

"Taichi, will you help me?"

"If course I'm coming with you. Even if you told me to stay here, I'd follow you."

"He tried to kill me. I don't know how much he expected to get, but for mere money, he would have killed *me,* Akihiro Tomoe. What a man, this Professor Ohata." After washing himself carefully, Tomoe used a bath towel to dry himself off. He picked up the bottle of rose-scented lotion. "Taichi, rub this on my back."

"Okay." Taichi spread the lotion on Tomoe's back. It was the same scent he had smelled from the golden-brown wolf in his dreams.

"Anthony. Was there anything in the news about our accident?"

"No, there was nothing in any of the papers or on the television."

"Good." Tomoe spread lotion on his face, chest and arms. "Anthony, my tuxedo, please. Tonight, we shall wear uniforms."

"Do you want your formal one?"

"Yes. An immaculate white shirt and black tie. Make it a midnight-black bowtie."

Taichi continued to spread lotion over the viscount's body until he reached Tomoe's beautiful ass. He discreetly reached around to touch an even more sensitive spot. "You're so much trouble. I was hoping we could continue our honeymoon tonight."

"Japanese samurai and Western knights are the same. They return insults with a challenge. I haven't been this angry in a very long time. But anger alone won't bring victory. Besides, there also has to be room for enjoyment."

Tomoe was now in full battle mode, and no one could stop him. After Taichi finished with the lotion, Tomoe picked up a silver comb and neatly swept his hair back. This hairstyle added to his composed look.

Anthony helped him don the tuxedo; he looked like he was ready to attend a formal party. The butler produced a long black coat, and when Tomoe put it on, his transformation into a stereotypical vampire was complete.

"What should I wear?"

"Your black leather jacket and jeans will be fine. That's your uniform."

"Won't we be too different?"

"It's better if you can move easily. I intend to burn the images of our true selves into Professor Ohata's memory."

The butler produced gloves. Tomoe remained hatless, but he looked like a tuxedo model.

"Maybe this is because you drank my blood," Taichi guessed as he observed this new aggressive streak in Tomoe. "The moon is out, and your blood is up. Akihiro, aren't you feeling in the mood?"

"Maybe. That could be the reason why I can't suppress my arousal."

Taichi discreetly looked at Tomoe's crotch.

"Let's hurry and finish this. We can continue our honeymoon before the moon sets." Tomoe jaunted toward the door. He didn't look like a half-breed vampire at all—he looked entirely like the real thing.

What is fear? When humans encounter something unfamiliar, they feel anxiety and fear.

Professor Ohata had been suffering a surfeit of anxiety and fear. After hitting Tomoe, he had run into the hospital and called for a nurse. Confessing that he had hit someone, he begged her to aid the victim. A young doctor asked him if the victim had broken bones or a concussion, but Ohata just told him that he would need to come and see for himself.

But when he opened the rear door of the car, no one was there. He asked around inside the hospital, but no one had seen two men who resembled Tomoe and Taichi. There was no way that two such conspicuous men could hide for long. Surely someone would have seen them. But no matter how hard he searched, he could find neither hide nor hair of either one. There wasn't even a trail of blood. Finally, when someone suggested calling the police, Ohata fled.

Because he had actually hit Tomoe on purpose, he was afraid of facing the police. Since that day, he had called in sick and holed up in his third-floor apartment. He was really glad that he didn't have a family—there was no one to bug him about what he had done.

He regretted that he had no skill at bargaining. Why hadn't he realized that Tomoe was one of Taichi Yamagami's kind? He had said too much when he'd talked with Tomoe. Why had he done that? Somehow, it seemed as if he just couldn't help himself. He had been unable to lie to the man.

What was he supposed to do now? If Tomoe had died, then he was a criminal. No matter how many days he thought about it, he couldn't come up with an answer. He had thought his plan was perfect. He had observed Tomoe's house for days, following them everywhere as though he were one of the paparazzi. For some reason, Tomoe only went out at night. Taichi sometimes went out during the day, but Ohata had seen no one else enter or leave the house.

He hadn't intended to hit Tomoe so hard. He'd thought only of separating Taichi from Tomoe after taking him to the hospital to talk the young man into giving him a blood sample.

"Where did I go wrong?"

In his folklore studies, he had examined the special characteristics of the blood of northern and southern people. It was then, with the aid of another scholar he knew, that the plan to get some of Taichi's blood was hatched. But the plan now lay in ruins.

"Did that man die? I wonder if Yamagami stole his Jaguar and ran away?" There had been nothing about it on the news, so perhaps Taichi had concealed Tomoe's dead body and fled.

"He was definitely gay, and he was targeting Yamagami. He seemed very strong too." Ohata laughed to himself. As time passed and there were no consequences, he found his mood improving. The police had not come. Taichi Yamagami had not come. No corpses had been discovered. Ohata's anxiety and fear began to fade. He thought he would go back to work tomorrow and just act as though nothing had happened. If anyone had heard about the uproar at the hospital, he would just say that he had been under a lot of stress lately.

There was absolutely nothing to worry about. It was getting late, and Ohata decided to go to bed and get some rest for the next day.

His two-bedroom apartment was crowded with books. Because he lived on the third floor, he didn't close the shutters. As he was a heavy smoker, his room soon became filled with smoke. Thinking to let some fresh air in, he headed for the doors leading to the terrace, but then he saw that the curtains were moving, as if being blown by a breeze. But that was impossible—he was sure he had closed and locked the doors earlier. Ever since the accident, he had been careful to always lock the doors. And yet the curtains were swaying.

When humans don't know the source of something, they feel anxiety and fear.

Hoping that he had simply forgotten to close the door, Ohata went toward it to check. In that instant, all of the lights in the room went out.

"Huh?"

None of the other lights in buildings all over the city had gone out. It was just in this room. The taste of fear was sharp in Ohata's mouth.

"Professor Ohata."

When a foreboding voice spoke suddenly next to his ear, Ohata jumped like a frog. "Eeek!"

He was afraid to look around. What if something supernatural was there?

"If you'd like to apologize, I'll listen." The voice was haughty and yet somehow tempting—almost like a hypnotic drawl.

Ohata recognized it immediately. Just a few days ago, he had turned the steering wheel of his car to hit the tawny-haired figure in the long black coat. Maybe the brakes weren't working as well as they should have been. But whatever the reason, Ohata still couldn't forget the sound of the car smashing the man in the back. Someone hit as hard as that would have to spend months in the hospital to recover.

"Professor Ohata?"

He was afraid to turn around, but he did; the curtains were suddenly thrown open, revealing a giant shadow standing in the doorway. The giant's eyes were glowing red. It was like being confronted by a wild animal at night on a deserted street. In panic, Ohata ran for the front door. But someone else was standing in his way.

Ohata was aware of only a black coat and a blinding-white shirt collar. The man before him looked like a vampire straight out of a movie.

"Aaaaah!"

"Don't scream. You'll wake the neighbors."

At these quiet words, Ohata's throat closed up, and all he could do was open and close his mouth like a fish out of water. He stepped backward in confusion and ran into something with a *thump*. About ten inches above Ohata's head, the giant's red eyes were glowing. He could go neither forward nor backward. Unable to scream, all Ohata could do was stand there, frozen.

"Taichi, hold Ohata."

Taichi grabbed Ohata in a stranglehold from behind. He held the professor so hard that his bones creaked and a cold sweat broke out on his forehead.

"Answer my questions. Have you spoken about Taichi to anyone else?"

Ohata knew that he could not resist answering any questions issued from those red lips. He had no choice but to tell the truth: "I haven't told anyone. The villagers warned me. They said that anyone who interfered with the Inugami would suffer their wrath."

"And yet you still tried to use Taichi?"

"It was for the sake of humanity, not out of self-interest!"

"No, it was greed. You just wanted money and fame."

"Well, yes; I did want money. I admit it. Please let me go!"

A white-gloved hand touched his carotid artery. "Shall I tell you something interesting? I am not an Inugami. I'm a vampire."

Ohata's eyes widened. Ordinarily, he would have shrugged off such a preposterous statement, but now that he was confronted by the two men standing before him, both of whom had miraculously entered a locked room, he had no choice but to believe.

"Relax. Your filthy cigarette habit has saved you. I will not drink such unpleasant blood." Tomoe laughed cruelly and pressed hard on Ohata's carotid artery. "Not only am I not going to take your life; I'm going to give you a wonderful present."

Ohata said nothing.

"You will be afraid of the night. You will be so frightened of the dark that you can hardly stand it."

The professor swallowed.

"You will now forget all about us, but your fear will remain. You fear the night. You fear."

"I...I fear the night."

"That's right. You fear the night. Especially nights when the moon is out. You will no longer be able to walk alone at night."

"I'm afraid; that's right, I fear the night."

"Forget all about Taichi Yamagami. Forget about me."

"I have no idea who you are."

"That's right; that's fine. From this day forward, you will always return home before nightfall. It's for you own sake."

...Ohata slowly came out of his trance. He seemed to have lost consciousness for a moment. For some reason, the terrace door was open and the cold night air was coming in. The room was pitch-dark, and as soon as he realized this, he felt a crushing fear. He felt that creatures in the shadows all around him were laughing at him, and that ghosts were concealed everywhere.

"Uh-uh-uh..." Nearly overcome by panic, Ohata somehow managed to grope his way to the circuit breakers, which had tripped for no known reason. With a trembling finger, he flipped the breakers up, and light returned to the room. He turned on every light in the apartment. He switched on the TV and turned the volume all the way up. With this light and noise filling his head, he was able to relax somewhat, but he was still afraid to go anywhere near the terrace doors.

Even though the cold wind was still whistling through the door, he was afraid to close it. Outside, darkness covered the city. Ohata was afraid. More than anything in the world, Ohata was afraid of the dark.

The Jaguar cut through the darkness like a knife. In spite of the cold wind, the windows were rolled down. The neon lights were reflected in the polished body of the luxury car as it sliced through the night.

"Is that it? And we got all dressed up for that?" Taichi seemed disappointed. "I thought you would do something flashier."

"It's very exhausting to command someone like that. And that command will last for a long, long time. Just whispering those few words requires intense preparation."

"You almost died. Is that all you're going to do to him?"

"It's worse than death. If I had killed him, his fear would have lasted but a moment. Now, he has to live his whole life in fear."

"You're cruel."

"That's right. I am cruel. But I know of one man who would still rescue a heartless bastard like me." After saying this, Tomoe suddenly stopped the car in a completely unexpected place.

When Taichi turned to look at the building they were parked in front of, he was surprised. "Is this all right? This is a church."

"And I'm a Christian. Even now. Well, I don't say grace before meals anymore." Tomoe got out of the car and walked toward the darkened church. Naturally, the door was locked, but Tomoe kneeled in front of the door, made the sign of the cross, and began praying.

"That's a surprise. I've never heard of a Christian vampire."

"I just make confessions from time to time. It's a habit from my childhood. When I do something bad, I repent. If something good happens, I talk about that, too. If God wants to cast me off because of what I am, then let him do so. Even if the gates of Heaven are never opened to me, I am happy to be a loyal child of God."

After confessing what he'd done to Ohata, Tomoe invited Taichi to walk in the park next to the church. Similar to a European park, there was a stylish arbor with exotic birds sleeping in the ceiling. As the unexpected visitors entered, the birds protested sleepily.

Ignoring them, Tomoe pulled Taichi under the arbor.

"Promise to make love to me even when the moon is down."

"That version of me probably won't be any good."

"Taichi, I think you have misunderstood something. I suppose your grandmother made you believe that there are two entirely different Taichis, but I think that those are just changes that occur when the moon is out; the essential you remains the same."

Tomoe made Taichi stand up straight, and extended his hand.

"What are you doing?"

"I'm going to show you how to dance. I was revived tonight. Now I want to start over."

"What does that have to do with dancing?"

"Just be quiet and follow my lead."

Taichi had never danced before, and his movements were clumsy. He often stepped on Tomoe's feet. But Tomoe didn't care; he continued to dance with his partner, who didn't seem to have much hope of improving.

"See, even on a moonlit night, you are no longer just a beast. You're a gentleman, dancing elegantly."

"It's just because I gave you blood—it's made me more docile than usual."

"It's not just that. You're intelligent, and you're learning to control yourself." As Tomoe spoke these reassuring words to Taichi, he continued to move gracefully through the steps of the dance. They were the same graceful movements that had evoked sighs from the high-society girls at the parties he had once attended decades ago.

"I promise that I will never look at another man. I made that vow back at the church."

"You're very strange. A failed vampire and a Christian. And you like men." Taichi stopped dancing and embraced Tomoe.

But Tomoe pushed him away. "If you're going to do that, it should be in our own bed."

"There's not enough time."

"Time doesn't matter. No matter when, I want to be loved by you." Although he seemed irritated, he touched Taichi's cheek.

"Akihiro, let's go home."

Taichi's expression was serious.

"Why? Let's dance a little more. It's a beautiful moonlit night."

"My blood may be a little thin right now, but the rest of me is ready to go. Let's continue our honeymoon. Or do you plan to finish our activities here in a church garden?"

Now that he knew that Tomoe had returned to full health, Taichi no longer had much patience left. Such a haughty emperor could only play the part of a loyal retainer for so long. "If you don't want to go home, I'll knock you out and carry you there. Or we could do it right here. I'll rip those complicated clothes right off you. Which would you prefer?"

"The tailor who made this suit is long dead. You won't find a fine product like this again. Please don't rip it."

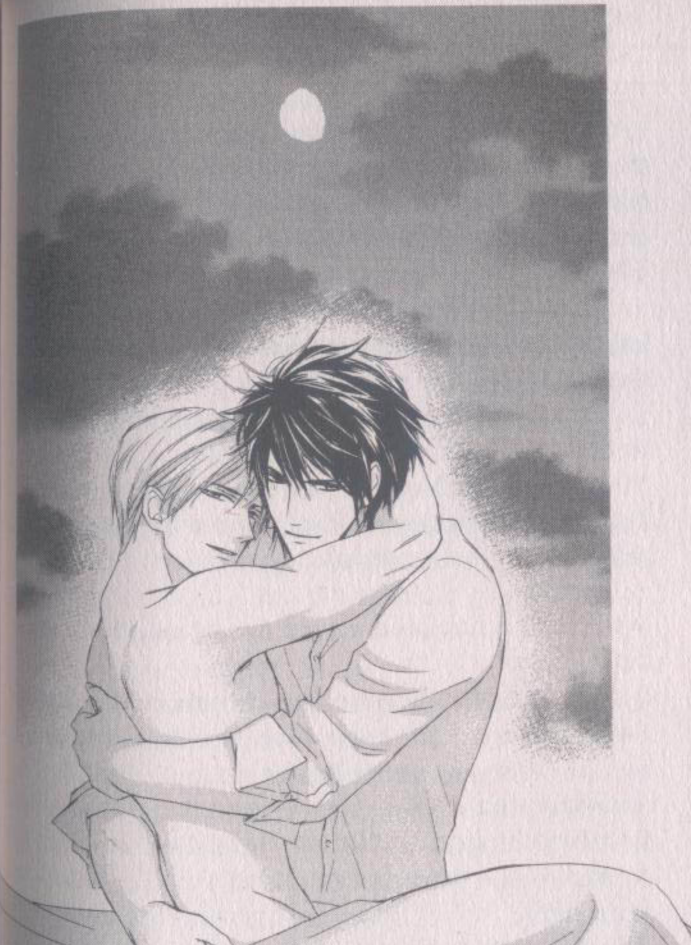
"Well, then." Taichi suddenly picked Tomoe up and carried him toward the car.

Tomoe felt a trace of lingering reluctance as he continued to gaze at the park. "It reminds me of another park from long ago. But this is holy ground. We mustn't do anything indiscrete here."

"Why are you talking to yourself? I know you have many past experiences, but we're going to make new memories together. Work with me a little, here." Taichi deposited Tomoe in the passenger seat and slid in behind the wheel as if it were the most natural thing in the world.

"You don't have a license."

"If we get stopped by a cop, just do your hoodoo



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thing on him. If you tell him to forget us, that'll be the end of it." Taichi took the key from Tomoe and started the engine with visible enjoyment. "My grandmother believed that I couldn't control myself, and so she said I could never live in the city. But look at me now—driving a Jaguar and all."

"Yes, and you were wearing your first suit not so long ago, while we enjoyed a date in the city. I suppose that suit is completely ruined?"

"Anthony's there. He's the best butler in the world. He'll be able to do something about it."

The Jaguar hummed with power as it sped through the streets. When they returned, the bed they shared was waiting for them. Anticipation grew in both of them.

A strange change began to take place within Tomoe's body. After lying down on the neatly made bed, Taichi began caressing him impatiently, and Tomoe responded. But this time, the nervousness he always felt at the beginning wasn't abating. He felt like he wanted to run away—like he was being chased, with Taichi baying at his heels.

As always, Taichi's tongue traveled a heated trail around Tomoe's body. Although he had moistened Tomoe's passage thoroughly, and although the pain he felt upon initial entry was no worse than it always had been, Tomoe found himself violently shaking his head "no."

"Maybe it's still too soon," Taichi said,

disappointed at this seeming rejection. Although Tomoe had initiated things, it seemed to Taichi that something was now wrong with his lover.

"No, it's not that...I don't know what it is...this feeling..."

"Should I use the rose-scented lotion? Okay, I'll get it." Taichi was being unusually careful.

It seemed that Tomoe's near-death experience had been quite a shock for Taichi. He wasn't just acting like a proud ruler tonight; he was also demonstrating an uncharacteristic tenderness.

"If I spread this inside, it'll ease the pain, right?" Taichi smeared the lotion on one thick finger and pushed Tomoe's legs wide open. As he did so, he noticed something different—Taichi was usually ready before Tomoe, but now, Tomoe was rock-hard.

"Are you suddenly in a hurry?"

As he inserted his finger in Tomoe's ass, Taichi concentrated his gaze on Tomoe's erect cock.

"Ah!" Tomoe typically experienced pleasant sensations, but this time, when Taichi touched him, it was like an electric shock coursing through his body. "Ah! Hmm...Ugh." Involuntarily, Tomoe pulled Taichi's head down, as if saying "don't stop."

The tip of Taichi's hot tongue toyed with the sensitive skin around the head of Tomoe's cock, and with just that gentle touch, Tomoe's hips began moving violently.

It was odd. Taichi's cock had not even entered him yet, and Tomoe was already fully aroused. In fact, he felt like he was coming. His body, which usually just accepted being entered, was reacting like an animal in heat.

"Harder...Ahhh—more. Please, more!"

Taichi's tongue continued its rough stimulation. But that wasn't enough; Tomoe needed even more. His body was feeling things more vividly than it had in a very long time. It seemed that Taichi's blood had rejuvenated his sex drive. It was the only explanation he could think of.

"Ahh—ahhh, more!"

"That's it; I'm at my limit. How long do you think I can continue to be so gentle?" Taichi had reached his breaking point. He'd been as caring as he could, but he wanted to make love to Tomoe so much, he could no longer stand it. "You're all slick inside now. I think that's enough lotion." With that, Taichi buried himself in Tomoe with such force that it seemed Tomoe might break.

Tomoe usually screamed in pain when Taichi first entered him, but this time, there was no resistance, and Taichi belatedly realized how useful the lotion really was.

"This is good. I should have listened to you earlier."

Unable to hold back, Tomoe was reaching for himself. "Ah, Taichi, do something!"

"What, you mean this?" Taichi knocked the viscount's hand away and began caressing Tomoe's cock himself. "You're already sticky. Usually, you don't come this fast."

Taichi's large hand encircled Tomoe's cock and gently pumped up and down. Tomoe's hips snapped back and forth in response. "That's good, ahhh! More!"

"Here?" Taichi rubbed his finger across the tip of Tomoe's cock.

Tomoe's entire body began to shake. For a moment, he didn't know what was happening. Usually, he would just tremble slightly as he reached climax, but this was entirely different. He ejaculated violently.

"What...What was that?"

But Taichi no longer had time to worry about Tomoe. He began moving furiously.

Tomoe had just experienced an intense release, but amazingly, he was already on the verge of another one.

"Ahhh—something's strange! Something's different. Ah...hnnn...again."

As Taichi penetrated ever deeper, Tomoe's erect cock strained even higher. If Tomoe said he wanted to come again, should Taichi begin caressing him again?

"Hn." Suddenly, Taichi lifted Tomoe's legs and hooked them over his shoulders.

"Hmm—ah! Ahhh." Tomoe had thought that only Taichi could maintain an erection for such a long time, but now, he found that he himself was hard again. "Taichi, please...touch me here."

He tried to guide Taichi's hand toward his cock, but Taichi brushed him off and said in a low voice, "Do it yourself. I want to watch." He had to be aware of Tomoe's condition, but Taichi wanted to tease him.

Tomoe was beyond thought; he began to pump his own cock. "Ooh! Mm . . . ahhh." Tomoe could only pant as he pleasured himself. This was something he had never done, even during the long spells between lovers—but control was now a thing of the past.

"Do you want it that bad?"

"Ah, ahhh—something's wrong! It's as if I'm on fire!"

"I don't think it's just pain, though, is it? You're really tight tonight."

"Ahhh! Oh, yes." Tomoe had always liked men, but he had never particularly liked sex itself. He liked being held gently, and he liked to have someone to sleep with. Or at least that's what he had always thought. Because he had so seldom been able to come, he'd had to be satisfied with the full, pleasant feeling that having someone inside of him provided.

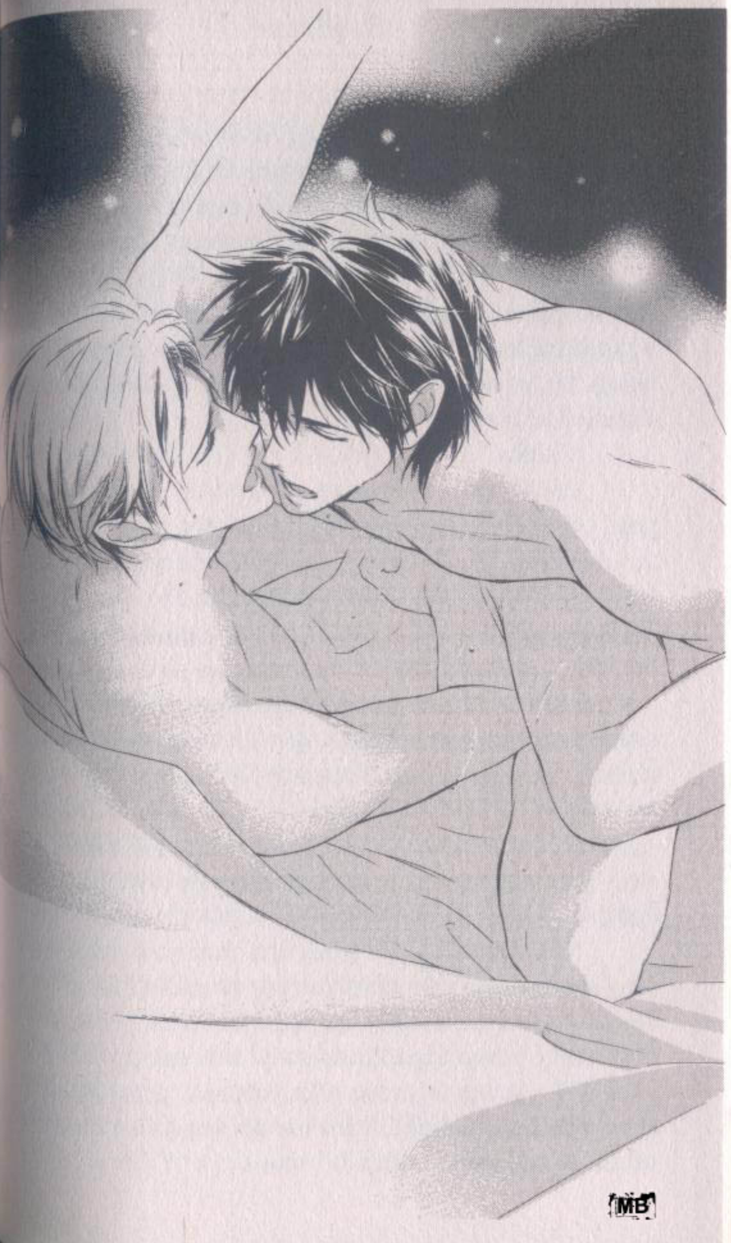
Tonight, Tomoe felt like a young boy again, having sex for the first time. His body throbbed all over. "I...I'm coming again! Ahhh!" His mind went blank as he felt himself explode again.

Taichi had also come at least once—but Taichi, being Taichi, was already ready to go again.

"Ahh...ahhh." Tomoe suddenly felt intensely fatigued. Ejaculating took great strength. His energy was flagging. He already needed another glass of juice—far earlier than usual. "Taichi...I need a drink..."

"Okay." Without even thinking about it, Taichi reached for the sharp knife on the bedside table and cut a small gash in his finger. He held the dripping finger out to Tomoe. "Here—suck on it."

"Mmmm." The taste of blood filled Tomoe's mouth. As he drank, a pleasant throbbing spread throughout his body. "Hn! Hmmm." Tomoe sucked



harder on Taichi's finger.

While he was doing this, Taichi enjoyed plunging into Tomoe's body, again and again. Before they knew it, the sky had begun to lighten.

"No, I want more...Ah, the morning sun..."

"Hold on; I'll close the window." Unexpectedly, Taichi placed Tomoe's arms around his neck and wrapped Tomoe's legs firmly around his hips. Then, using his amazing strength, he stood up with Tomoe attached to him like a limpet.

"Taichi."

Taichi took great care not to drop Tomoe. "Hey, hold on tight. I think you can probably look briefly at the dawning sun." He carried Tomoe over to the small window and set him down next to it. He then turned Tomoe to face the window and embraced him from behind. "Look outside."

Both of them thought that there wasn't enough time, but perhaps Taichi was greedier. He wanted more time with Tomoe than only what was allowed by moonlight.

"It's the dawn." The moon was still riding the sky, but the first rays of the sun were peeking over the horizon.

"It's beautiful." For the first time in a very, very long time, Tomoe watched the day break; all the while, Taichi continued to press against his back. "I wonder how many years it has been since I last saw daylight?"

"If you drink some of my blood, you should be able to bear some light. I don't understand the reason for it; it's just my gut feeling."

"I had forgotten it was this color." The clouds were vivid, tinged with pink, and birds were already flying slowly by. "It's so beautiful."

"That's enough. I'll wake you up a little earlier tonight and we can watch the sunset together."

"Oh, I'd like to watch a little longer."

But Taichi drew the curtain closed and picked up Tomoe—who was now nearly unconscious—and carried him to the bed.

"Akihiro, it's time to wake up."

Tomoe wondered drowsily when Anthony had started addressing him so informally. He opened his eyes, and the first thing he saw was Taichi.

"Where's Anthony?" Tomoe asked, suddenly worried. Because Anthony had been changed into a vampire so much earlier than Tomoe, he never knew when the old man would disappear forever.

"Don't worry. He seemed more tired than usual, so I decided to let him sleep as long as he wanted."

"Thank goodness." Tomoe realized that Taichi was holding his juice.

"This stuff is harder to defrost than you'd think. I made Anthony show me again and again until I could get it so that the juice and blood don't separate."

"Umm. It's perfect. You do good work." After handing the empty glass to Taichi, Tomoe nestled back into the bed. "You promised to look at the sunset with me. It's about that time now."

"All right." Taichi held out an inviting hand, but Tomoe still didn't get out of bed.

He was embarrassed. His body seemed to have regained the vigor of youth, and he was once again as hard as a rock.

"I'm not as polite as Anthony. C'mon, get up and take your shower."

"Ah!"

Taichi pulled the blanket away suddenly, and Tomoe didn't have time to cover himself. He was exposed to Taichi's hot gaze.

"I've felt strange since yesterday. Your blood is too strong. Plus, I've only been drinking women's blood until now."

"I wake up like that all the time."

"What do you do about it?"

"If you just leave it alone, it'll go away. But this is the easiest way to take care of it." Taichi lowered his head and engulfed Tomoe's cock in his mouth. He'd done this before, but today was somehow different. In addition to using his tongue, he skillfully hollowed his cheeks and used suction to stimulate Tomoe, who soon melted and groaned.

"Taichi." Because he'd just woken up, Tomoe's sense of time was off. He suddenly realized that this was not the Taichi who was ruled by the moon. This was Taichi during the day; the Taichi who held himself back and focused on pleasuring Tomoe.

"Ah! Ahhh!" Taichi's caresses were unbelievably gentle, so Tomoe closed his eyes and gave himself over to the experience. "If you can do things like this, why haven't you done them before?"

"I'm better than him, right? He never has time for this kind of thing."

"If you recognized you were both the same, this would be a lot easier. Taichi, you have to resolve this issue." Tomoe's plea was heartfelt—he wanted this gentle treatment every day. He didn't think he could ask for anything more.

"I have resolved it."

"What do you mean?"

"I've decided to live as I want to, whether the moon is out or not. You have freed my heart." Done talking, Taichi continued to pleasure Tomoe.

"I've been remembering since yesterday...I had forgotten that it felt so good to reach release...Oh, I'm coming again! Taichi, let go!"

But Taichi kept his mouth where it was and swallowed. It was the first time in ninety-two years that this had happened, and Tomoe was deeply moved. He laid back and stared blankly at the ceiling.

"What's wrong? Do you want more?" Taichi sat on the side of the bed and gently stroked Tomoe's hair.

"No, it's just that...everything I was missing has been returned to me today. It still doesn't seem real. I had forgotten what it was like."

"It feels great, right? It feels like your soul is flying out of your body."

"You *are* a poet, aren't you? Then my soul has flown three times since yesterday—I feel drunk."

"Well, then, I'll just have to carry you." Taichi dressed Tomoe in his robe and swept the viscount up in his arms before leaving the bedroom. "I promised to show you the sunset."

"I've already seen the sunrise."

"From now on, you can see as many of both as you want to." Taichi smiled. "Hey, Akihiro, let's buy an RV, okay?"

Tomoe leaned against Taichi's sturdy chest. "First, you have to get a license."

Taichi laughed as he carried Tomoe into the living room. All of the curtains were open, and the windows framed the sea. "We wasted too much time upstairs. The most beautiful part of it has passed."

"This is beautiful enough."

The orange color was the same, but dawn and sunset were somehow very different. For some reason, the sunset was melancholy, with the clouds in the sky already changing to black. The cawing of crows added to the sad atmosphere.

"Akihiro, let's take a trip. We don't have to go far—a nearby mountain will be fine. Let's go to the ocean too. We'll get an RV with a freezer and a pitch-black bedroom. I'm getting used to the city, but I miss nature. Sometimes, I just want to immerse myself in a deep forest. If I can't, I feel like I might not be able to survive."

Taichi sat Tomoe in a chair on the terrace and looked at the distant sea, watching it sparkle red in the sunset. "I'm sure you've traveled a lot, but now I'd like you to observe my small little part of the world. There are a lot of things I'd like to show you."

"Fireflies."

"Yes, that's right."

"The day breaking over a field of grass."

"Yeah."

"The moon shining on the mountains."

Taichi had thought that Tomoe was unconscious when he'd spoke of such things, but it seemed that the viscount had heard every word that Taichi said.

"The evening sun sinking into the ocean. Fish jumping on the surface of the river."

"Yes."

"I've never seen any of those things, but I can remember them as though I had. These are your memories. You live within me." Tomoe touched his own carotid artery. He could feel the blood pulsing there.

"I'm sorry to have kept you waiting. I seem to have overslept." The butler hurried onto the terrace, carrying a tea tray.

Tomoe looked at the man's unusually disordered hair and laughed. "Anthony—so even you can sleep in."

"Yamagami-sama was kind enough to suggest it, so I indulged." The tea he poured was as delicious as ever.

Tomoe bowed his head over his cup, absolutely content. The sun had disappeared completely behind the horizon, and clouds were scudding in, covering the twinkling stars. It looked like it might rain tomorrow.

If it rained, Taichi would be gentle. Just now, Tomoe was in the mood to be treated gently, and although he usually hated rainy nights, he thought to himself that sometimes, just sometimes, maybe rain wasn't such a bad thing.

Night Of The Moon

The courier service had been instructed to deliver packages to that house only in the evening. As usual, when the deliveryman rang the bell at eight o'clock, the door was opened by Anthony, who was dressed in a black suit, not a hair out of place.

"Delivery."

"Thank you very much." Anthony signed for the package.

"This is a regular delivery." The deliveryman handed over the package, which was different from the refrigerated packages they usually received. As Anthony took it, a tiny smile crossed his usually solemn face.

"Thank you. I've been waiting for this package."

The butler never spoke this much, and the deliveryman was surprised. He smiled genuinely. "That's great. I'm happy to be of service." After this somewhat shy declaration, the young deliveryman turned and left with his usual energy.

Anthony carried the package to the living room and used a sharp paperknife to open the international package. It was addressed in English to Anthony Sterns. Below it was written the name of the sender, and Anthony traced the letters softly with one finger.

It was a woman's name.

He opened the package. Inside rested a black silk scarf and a pair of black leather gloves. On top of the scarf was a white envelope, sealed in the old style, with wax. Taking care not to damage the envelope, Anthony carefully broke the seal.

My dear Anthony Sterns,

How is your second stay in Japan going? Has my charming son Akihiro found a new love yet?

This is the one hundred and seventy eighth anniversary of your rebirth. Please accept this modest gift as my congratulations. I pray that your nights are all beautiful and peaceful.

Anthony pressed his lips briefly to the signature before returning the letter to the envelope, leaving it exactly as it had been.

"Anthony, look! I found something great!" Taichi descended the stairs waving what looked like a black sleeping bag.

"What is it?" Anthony asked as he quietly carried the package into his own room beside the kitchen.

"It's a substitute for a coffin. The armed forces use these to transport dead bodies. They're very opaque. If we add one more layer of black cloth, they'll be perfect."

The butler nodded. "I've often thought that something like that must exist, but didn't think it was really necessary."

"We're going on a trip, Anthony! That reminds me, how did you two travel here from England?"

"One of our brethren owns a shipping company. For long trips, he arranges a safe and reliable ship."

"I see—a ship." A long journey on a ship might be boring for humans, but it was nothing for vampires. A long sea trip could even be enjoyable. "Oh, and Anthony—look at this!" Taichi proudly produced a small card and showed to the butler.

"Is that your driver's license?"

"That's right. I'm going to get my international permit next."

Anthony wondered about the odds that Taichi would actually apply the "new driver" sticker to the car. Perhaps during the day, the sticker would be diligently applied, at least.

"Isn't Akihiro up yet?"

"He's changing right now. Are you planning to go out tonight?"

"Yes. We're going for a drive."

"Are *you* driving?"

"Of course." Taichi exhibited his driver's license again and laughed happily.

"You'll be eating out, then?"

"I want to go to Chinatown and eat until I'm stuffed. Anthony, should we bring you back a steamed meat bun?"

"No, no, nothing for me." Anthony smiled somewhat bitterly. He was happy for Taichi, but it had been many years since he'd been able to eat anything. Even so, he was a world-class chef.

"My lover certainly is noisy when the moon is out." Tomoe walked languorously into the living room. "I suppose you plan to drag me hither and thither again tonight." Tomoe sat on Taichi's lap, wrapped an arm around his neck, and kissed him affectionately.

"You don't mind going out on a date, do you? If we don't, we'll just spend the whole night in bed. Or would you rather do that?" Taichi asked this in an inviting voice, and then turned to kiss Tomoe on the base of the neck.

"No, I must continue your training on how to be a gentleman—even on moonlit nights. Anthony, we're going out. Enjoy a nice, quiet night."

"Yes, sir. Please be careful." Anthony went to the entry hall and took out Tomoe's coat. "It's a very nice night. I hope you both have a very enjoyable evening." The butler opened the door for the couple and watched as they left.

"I'm driving."

"You've certainly become cocky since you got your license. If you drive recklessly, the police will stop us."

As he listened to the two exchange words on the way to the garage, Anthony nodded his head in satisfaction. As he had the house to himself, he planned to spend his time cleaning Tomoe's room. If he had time after that, he would polish the silver. He treasured that silver; it was likely that it would remain in the world long after he was gone.

The lights of Chinatown dazzled Tomoe's eyes; even though it was night, he wore his sunglasses.

"The smell of food is making me hungry. I've got to eat!"

As he escorted Tomoe through the crowd of people on the way to dinner, Taichi bought a huge steamed meat bun and began stuffing it in his mouth.

"I agree. This town does whet the appetite." Skimpily dressed young women were everywhere. Tomoe could smell various scents on them—makeup, cologne, deodorant, and also a strange sweetness. It would have stimulated desire in anyone, but it was even more enticing to Tomoe.

"Very clever, Akihiro. Don't extend your fangs."

"Sadly, I couldn't even if I wanted to."

Of course, the smells weren't all pleasant. Among the people passing by, Tomoe detected an impure odor emanating from some. It was the smell of narcotics—drugs that destroyed their users. Blood containing these substances was repulsive to vampires.

As he watched the women who passed him by, Tomoe sighed. "Young Japanese women today seem to think that not eating much is a virtue. I think they're mistaken."

"Don't worry about it. For now, we have no need to buy Japanese blood." Taichi pulled Tomoe into the restaurant at which they had reservations.

Not so long ago, Taichi had had no idea where anything in the city was, but now, he knew his way around perfectly. He had reserved a private room and ordered that the lighting be turned down low. He looked over the menu with no hesitation. As though Taichi had been born to a life of wealth, he ordered one thing after another—never once looking at the price.

Tomoe ate very little. Instead, he enjoyed the scents mingling in the air and drank Chinese rice wine. "It's fascinating to watch you eat."

Taichi steadily consumed the food laid out before them, eating enough for two. "You're lucky, Akihiro. There are others like you all over the world. When you have the time, I'd like to find out if there are others like me out there."

"All right. But if there are any beautiful wolf-ladies out there, you'd better not go after them during the full moon. I have no intention of sharing you."

"I'll only hang out with other wolf-men."

"And what if one of them is a young, pure-spirited wolf-man?"

"Do you think such a thing exists? I doubt it. Wolf-men must all be full of energy."

Especially during the full moon; they were overflowing with energy.

The two of them would no doubt share many full moons together. Tomoe was determined to seize this chance for happiness. His lover took good care of him, and his joy in sex had returned. He couldn't ask for anything more; but there was still one problem. Surviving as a vampire required a lot of money. It was expensive whether buying blood or paying someone who was willing to offer up their blood. Just the amount of money it took to protect his secret was staggering.

"Taichi, when things calm down a little, you should study hotel management. I'd like to open a few petit hotels in the city center that cater solely to women—places where they can feel safe."

"Petit hotels? What are you talking about?"

"I originally managed hotels. I still own a few small-scale hotels in England—I'll show them to you when we go there in about twenty years."

"Akihiro, who do you think I am?" Taichi squeezed a lemon slice into a glass of Chinese rice wine and gulped it down like water. Nothing of the hesitant country bumpkin remained in his expression. "I'm a different person. I can control myself now. When the moon is down, I could even travel overseas by myself."

"You're right."

"Please have more confidence in me. I probably can't do it just yet, but eventually, I'll become a fitting business partner."

As Tomoe watched this newly confident Taichi, he felt a little lonely. Taichi was growing up, but Tomoe would not change anymore. All he could do for the rest of Taichi's life was step aside and protect him as best he could.

"So, a hotel, huh? Okay. But I've never been to school. You're not going to tell me that I have to go to university now, are you?"

"Part of managing is finding capable people. I'll do the interviews."

"Then I'll be there, watching."

"Don't worry. An employee would never make a move on their manager." Tomoe's mood improved a little. The fact that Taichi still got jealous made him happy. Taichi's jealousy was a bit childish, but that just made it more enjoyable.

After dinner, the two of them went for a drive through the city. The moon shone gently; to Tomoe, the whole world seemed to sparkle.

"Akihiro, I don't think I can wait until we get home. What should we do in this situation?"

"We could go to a hotel meant for just that purpose. But since we're two men, we might not get a very friendly reception," Tomoe joked.

"A hotel? I thought anyone could stay at a hotel."

"The hotels I'm talking about are just for sex. They used to be called love hotels, but when I returned to Japan this time, people were calling them fashion hotels or petit hotels."

"Let's go to one."

At Taichi's suggestion, Tomoe vehemently shook his head. "You must remember sometimes that I am from the Meiji era. There are some things I'm just not comfortable with. I don't want to have sex in a bed that who knows how many people have slept in. There's nowhere else to go, and you can't wait, so..."

"Okay, I get it. I'll look for a deserted spot."

"No, Taichi, let's go home." Tomoe took Taichi's hand in his, but his entreaties fell on deaf ears. The young man had been out under the moonlight for a long time now and his eyes were glowing red.

"Let's go to the harbor. We can do it while we watch the ocean."

"It's a bad idea. There are a lot of police cars out tonight."

There really were more patrol cars than usual on the street, but Taichi wasn't be scared off by that.

"I can't wait that long. Chinese food has a lot of nutrition."

"If you eat that much of anything, it's going to give you a lot of energy." Tomoe's tone was accusatory, but Taichi paid no attention.

It didn't seem like anything was going to stop him. The black Jaguar headed for the docks.

"A ship. It would be fun to travel by ship too. Akihiro, next, I'll get a boat license. Then we can make a lot of money and buy a cruiser. I'll take you to the southern isles."

"You're very ambitious under the moonlight." But Tomoe had no doubt that Taichi would eventually accomplish everything he said he would. He knew they'd visit the southern isles on a cruiser one day. "I've lived more than one hundred years, but I've never had a more passionate lover than you."

Taichi pulled in among some warehouses on the wharf; it looked like people rarely came there. Taichi parked the Jaguar and instantly put the seatbacks down. "Okay, no one's going to show up here, so you can stop thinking about other men."

With the seatback down, Tomoe could see the moon clearly from the window. For a while, the two men lay back uncomfortably, looking up at the moon.

"It's too cramped in here. And if we get the seats dirty, Anthony will be mad. Akihiro, let's get out."

"And do it in the shadow of the warehouse? There's absolutely no elegance to that." Even as he said this, Tomoe got out of the car. The night wind felt wonderful. There were no artificial lights, no buzz of electricity here. All Tomoe could hear was the quiet sound of the waves, and the only light was that from a distant lighthouse.

"It's a beautiful night. Akihiro, I love you." With this confession of love—made without a hint of shyness—Taichi kissed Tomoe passionately.

Tomoe put his arms around Taichi and gave himself up to the enjoyment of the night. If all nights could be like this, his existence—hovering somewhere between life and death—would once again be worth living to the fullest.

Afterword

Thank you for buying this book. It was decided that small paperback versions of *Secret Moon* and *Secret Night* would be released simultaneously. If you haven't read *Secret Night* yet, I urge you to do so as soon as possible.

If you're a first-time reader, thank you very much.

I really like the character Tomoe. Even though he's not a perfect vampire, he's still very manly. If you liked him too, then that makes me very happy.

From time immemorial, vampires have been popular staples of the horror genre. What is the attraction? I think it's that they're not just soulless monsters—they have an intellectual air about them. They're monsters who philosophize over the anguish of their existence. That's the drawing point.

If they don't drink the blood of living beings, they cannot survive. But they were once human themselves, so that is a source of distress. Maybe it's because that dilemma is so fascinating; in any case, they certainly seem to motivate writers.

In the Afterword to the last book, I was influenced by a vampire movie. I wrote a little bit about it then.

Blade 3, about a vampire hunter who is half-human and half-vampire, opens soon. I'm really looking forward to it.

What's that you say? But a vampire hunter would be the enemy? Yes, that's true. But all of the vampires in my world are wealthy and refined. They never bother other people; they are philanthropists. I wouldn't want hunters to go after them. What to do?

Blade is very, very cool, (No, seriously. He carries a Japanese sword and chops vampires to pieces.) but I wouldn't like it if he were hunting Tomoe.

Speaking of blood, recently there have been several shows about blood types on TV.

I'm Type A. It's the most common type, and we are often said to be perfectionists. But how am I type A? I'm terrible at keeping things neat, and I have absolutely no business ability. I'm not even remotely interested in tidiness. Although the whole blood type idea doesn't work for me, it can still be the subject of a story. In my home, there are both A and B types, and we all get along very well. Anyway, if I get the chance, I'd like to look into the subject more deeply one day.

Tomoe Sato did the illustrations for me. Coincidentally, her name is the same as that of the main character. I apologized because I thought it might somehow make things harder for her. But she produced some really wonderful illustrations for both books, and I'd like to sincerely thank her.

To my editor, H-sama: Thank you very much for everything, especially for bringing out both books.

And finally, to my readers: Thank you from the bottom of my heart for buying this book. I hope that you, and many new readers, will continue to read my stories.

It's wonderful to walk under a moonlit sky. I pray for the day when women can freely enjoy that experience, even when walking alone.

—Gou Siira

It may make them look
older, but I really like
the swept-back look.

Thank you very much,
-Sato Tomoe

Written By

Siira Gou

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Illustrated By

Sato Tomoe

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Secret Moon

月の秘密

PARENTAL ADVISORY EXPLICIT CONTENT

June

Yaoi Novel